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LONDON: T. FISHER UNWIN

MONOLOGUES

BY

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T. FISHER UNWIN
LONDON : ADELPHI TERRACE
LEIPSIC : INSELSTRASSE 20

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Thanks are due to the Editors of "The Academy" and "Vanity Fair" for permission to reprint most of the essays in this volume.

MONOLOGUES

I

THE DECAY OF THE ESSAY

Owing to the general laxity with which men and women use the language they inherit, in the course of years words are apt to be broadened and coarsened in their meaning. Striving against this tendency, every scrupulous writer is in danger of robbing words of a part of their birthright: through fear of letting them mean too much he makes them mean too little. Ultimately, of course, the popular meaning prevails, and we suck our fountain-pens in vain who seek to preserve a kind of verbal aristocracy; but it is a pleasant game while it lasts, and it does no one any harm.

For instance, there is this word “essay.” It is used to-day loosely to mean almost any

kind of prose article, especially when such articles are rescued from periodical literature and reprinted in book form. Mr. Chesterton's twisted allegories are essays, and so are Mr. Lucas's pleasant pilferings from queer books, and Mr. Shaw's dramatic criticisms. So, too, for that matter, are Earle's characters, and the Roger de Coverley papers, and Swinburne's laudations of the Elizabethan dramatists. Confronted with this embarrassing promiscuity, the critic who really wishes the word "essay" to mean something is forced to give it a purely arbitrary meaning, and this I have ventured to do in choosing a title for my lament. To say that the art of writing little articles for the newspapers and republishing them in modest volumes is decaying would be absurd ; but to say that at the present time very few people are trying to write like Charles Lamb is patently true. To me, essays are such leisurely expressions of a humane and agreeable personality as we find in the works of Elia. They may criticize and rhapsodize and narrate, but the reader is always conscious of the individuality that controls the pen.

A fit medium of expression for tranquil minds, they reveal with a careless generosity the mind emotions and placid processes of thought that give them birth. The delicately-flattered reader feels that the essayist is guarding no Bluebeard's chamber of the mind. As far as the hospitable writer has himself explored it, so far are its dim corridors open to his inquiring eyes.

For of all forms of artistic expression, this is the most personal and self-revealing. It might be described as the art of expression in dressing-gown and carpet-slippers. A bad man, if there be any bad men, might endeavour to express a moment of his criminal life in a sonnet or a short story or a romance ; but he would, I hope, think too highly of humanity in general to seek to reflect it in his own lost person. Yet this is the work of the essayist. "These I fear," he says with spirit, "are my meannesses, my weaknesses, my vices ; but, on the other hand, I have, I think, these trivial virtues. Perhaps there are other men like me ! " No bad man could write like that ; he would rather believe himself unique in his villainy.

And this brings me to the quality that leads men to write essays. Being men of leisurely mind, it might naturally be presumed that they would be satisfied with dreaming, and that they would leave the drudgery of writing to men of action. But it is apparent to me that the true essayist is a man troubled with a great loneliness. He finds, doubtless, being a generous lover of his fellows, a number of acquaintances who share and even surpass his own special virtues ; but he cannot discover in his personal environment those rarer beings who should also disclose his own delicate vices ; and these are the men above all others with whom he wishes to come in contact. So he takes pen and paper, and, setting down his faults and his merits with a high fairness, stretches, as it were, a pair of appealing hands to his comrades in the world. This habit of analysing his own weakness gives him an introspective turn of mind. He is always lying in wait to catch himself tripping ; but he would not have you ignore the other side of his character ; he wishes to be fair to himself and honourable to you. He prepares a kind of

balance-sheet for Judgment Day, and he is above all things anxious that it should be correct. His heart, to use a worthily hackneyed phrase, is in his work, and he appoints humanity his auditor.

Essays are written by leisurely men for leisurely readers. You cannot read Lamb as you read a romance—passionately—tearing the pages. The words flow smoothly across the printed pages, and you drift comfortably with the current, pausing here and there, as doubtless Lamb paused in the writing, to dream in some twilit backwater of thought. The nominal purpose of the voyage may be trifling ; but its true purpose is as splendid as all high human endeavour. We do not really dare the great adventure in order to see Charles Lamb dreaming over the crackling of roast pork, or Mr. Max Beerbohm in rapt contemplation of his hat-box. Our autumn has its pork, and we, too, have our hat-boxes. We set out, like all great explorers, in search of ourselves, and our common sense tells us that we are most likely to get authentic news of our destination from the intellectual

honesty of the essayists. Theirs is the seasoned wisdom and ripe authority of old travellers, and we realize in reading their log-books that our road does not differ greatly from theirs. Perhaps at the end of the journey we shall know that all roads are one.

I suppose that, using the word "essay" in the restricted sense I have suggested, the great essayists might easily be numbered on a baby's toes, and, as one of them still flourishes, the decay that has overtaken this form of expression may not be immediately obvious. But in the past there has always been a host of minor essayists, writers who might not achieve a great partnership between their hearts and their pens, but who did agreeable work nevertheless, and it is the absence of these minor writers of essays from the number of our modern authors that alarms me. It is true that we have our Charles Lamb, but I look in vain for our Leigh Hunt. Nor can we let ourselves be put off with some of the very able work that appears in periodicals, and has the shape and length and general outward ap-

pearance of real essays. Journalism is growing more impersonal, though by no means less egoistic, and you may search the writings even of our individual journalists, such as Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Lucas, Mr. Benson and Mr. Belloc, in vain for a decent confession of personal weaknesses. It is true they set down their petty private vices—no one who even pretends to write essays can help doing that—but they make them appear either humorously criminal, or like so many virtues in disguise, and we have seen that your true essayist is neither a sinner nor a saint, but just a common man like his readers. So while we who are ashamed of the skeletons in our waistcoat-pockets may read the writings of these gentlemen for their wit and cleverness, we will continue to turn to Lamb and Montaigne for sympathy and advice. They will bring us to the place where dreams blend with realities, and action puts on the gentle gown of thought.

The fact is, that essays are bad journalism in the literal sense of that elastic word, because they take no count of time, while it

is the function of journalism to tear the heart out of to-day. A good essay should start and end in a moment as long as eternity ; it should have the apparent aimlessness of life, and, like life, it should have its secret purpose. Perhaps the perfect essay would take exactly a lifetime to write and exactly a lifetime to comprehend ; but, in their essence, essays—I cling to my restricted sense of the word—ignore time and even negate it. They cannot be read in railway trains by travellers who intend to get out at a certain station, for the mere thought of a settled destination will prevent the reader from achieving the proper leisurely frame of mind. Nor can they be written for a livelihood, for a man who sits down to write an essay should be careless as to whether his task shall ever be finished or not.

It may be said confidently that few persons write like this to-day ; it may even be objected by sticklers for accuracy in titles that few persons have ever written like this, and I am willing to agree. But the essayist whom I have described is the perfect type—that ideal which less gifted men can only

pursue to the brink of their graves ; and while in some measure this was always the ideal of periodical writers in the past, it certainly is in no wise the ideal of the journalists of to-day. They do not wish to write sympathetically of themselves ; they cannot linger with leisurely trains of thought. Breathless assurance, dogmatic knowledge, and a profusion of capital "we"s help them to sing their realization of the glories of to-day, their passionate belief in the future, their indifferent contempt for the past. These are, they tell us, days of action, and dreamers can have but short shrift in a common-sense world. Probably this is true, but I notice that the literature of action does not make its readers very comfortable. Men and women are growing weary-eyed these days, and their feet stumble like those of tired runners. Their voices are growing hoarse from shouting energetic prophecies into the deaf ears of the future, and their hands are sore from their unending task of holding the round earth in its place. They cannot dream because they will not allow themselves to sleep.

It may be morbid, but I sometimes think that I can detect a note of wistfulness in the eyes of my neighbours in life, when they let them stray from their newspapers to rest for a moment on the leaves of my book. Once I discovered a tear on the cheek of a clerk in the city, and I taxed him with this mark of treachery to the life of action ; but he assured me that his sorrow was due to the low price of Consols. It may have been ; I do not know. But one of these days our journalists will have to stop to take breath, and in the universal holiday perhaps some of their readers will have time to write essays.

II

THE TYRANNY OF THE UGLY

WHEN a young man first awakens to a sense of the beauty and value of life, it is natural that he should be overwhelmed by the ugliness of the inheritance that his ancestors have forced upon him. He finds in the civilization that he has had no place in devising, a tyranny against which it appears almost impossible to make any resistance, a dogma which he is told every one except a young fool must accept as a truth, a law the breaking of which will number him beyond redemption among the criminal or the insane. It may be that in the first joy of his appreciation of the beautiful, he will think that his life and the life of any man may best be passed in the cultivation of a keener sense of beauty, that, to put it in a concrete form,

it is better to grow and love roses in a cottage garden than to reign in an 'umbrella factory ; but this briefest of the allusions of youth will be shattered forthwith by what appears to be the first law of civilized life, that a man can only earn his living by the manufacture of ugliness.

It is probable that in his bitterness the young man will turn for comfort to those latter-day prophets and philosophers whose wisdom perhaps may have solved a problem which seems to him beyond hope, but he will certainly be disappointed. On the one hand he will find the wise men of the day devising schemes for the proper management and control of umbrella factories with a view to the greatest public good ; on the other he will find them sighing for the roses of mediævalism, or proving by ingenious paradox that clear vision can find the Middle Ages even now in the lesser streets of Balham. For our prophets and our philosophers have forgotten that they were ever young, and with the passing years their ideal world has become a sort of placid alms-house, free from draughts and disturbances, a place

where the aged and infirm can sit at ease and scheme little revolutions on a sound conservative basis, without any jarring note of laughter or discord of the hot blood of the young. And so the young man must turn to the poets, and find what comfort he may in the knowledge that there are others who have felt and feel even as he, that there are others who have wondered whether the best of a man's life should be spent in paying for the blotting out of nature with unsightly lumps of brick and steel, in aiding in the manufacture of necessaries that are not necessary, in repeating stupidly the ugly crimes of yesterday in order to crush the spirit of his children and his children's children.

Of course it may be said that this love of beauty on the part of a young man is morbid and unnatural, and the just consequence of an unwise or defiant education, for civilization, with a somewhat ignoble cunning, has guarded against possible treachery on the part of her children, by causing them to be taught only such things as may lead them to her willing service.

It is unnecessary to point out that the dangerous revolutionary spirit which worships lovely things is not encouraged in our national schools. The children of the State are taught to cut up flowers and to call the fragments by cunning names, but they are not invited to love them for their beauty. They can draw you a map of the railway line from Fishguard to London, and prattle glibly of imports and exports, and the populations of distant countries, but they know nothing of the natural beauties of the places they name, nor even of such claims as there are in the city in which they live. Their lips lisp dates and the dry husks of history, but they have no knowledge of the splendid pageant of bygone kingdoms and dead races. Nor in our public life, which might better be named our public death, is there shown any greater regard for the spiritual side of the parents than there is for that of the children. Heedless of the advice of artists, the ignorant and uncultured men whom ambition alone has placed in a responsible position, will ruin the design of a street for the sake of a few pieces of silver, and for

the fear that the spending of public money on making London beautiful may endanger their seats at the next election with honest electors who have learnt their lesson of ugliness only too well. The cheaper newspapers, which alone are read by the people as a whole, seek out and dilate on ugliness with passionate ingenuity, and even those papers which appear to be read by the more leisured classes, find no disgrace in filling five columns with the account of a bestial murder, and in compressing the speech of a great man of letters into a meagre five lines.

Where, then, can a young man seek for beauty in the life of to-day? Only, as I have said above, in literature, and only there because the mere writing of a book is not sufficient to make it a contribution to literature if it be not at the same time an expression of that beauty of life which is, in spite of our rulers, eternal. For there are ugly books enough, and there are a multitude of ugly writers to swell their numbers, but our critics, when they are honest, can render their labours vain; and though there is an

outcry in the camps of the ugly when such a critic has spoken his daring word, the word has been spoken, and the book is dismissed to the shelves of the folk who care for such trash. But our critics must be honest.

III

THE TRUE BOHEMIA

IT is not too much to say that in the view of ordinary persons Bohemianism is a pose, and, moreover, a very troublesome pose. They see that as a class Bohemians are careless in their dress, eccentric in their morals, and fonder of literature than seems proper to reasonable folk ; and, not content with being annoyed, they conclude with a natural but hardly intelligent egoism that this neglect of the conventions on the part of the natives of Bohemia is adopted solely for the purpose of annoying aliens. This error, which does not prevail among unintellectual people alone, were pardonable if the sedate did not immediately conclude that this “pose” is itself Bohemianism, and that therefore if you could make a Bohemian put on a clean collar, discard his library of poets, and attend a

series of Salvationist meetings, you would at once change him to a respectable ratepayer with a sitting in a chapel and a decent villa in a decent back-street of Philistia. In a word, they confuse the external manifestations of the Bohemian spirit with that spirit itself.

It must be a matter of regret to every one who has the Bohemian interests at heart that Stevenson never wrote an essay on the subject. His sympathy and admiration for youth exactly qualified him for the task, and as it is I believe it to be possible to state the Bohemian position very well by quoting from his books. Always self-conscious, he never wrote about youth without casting a forgiving eye on his own, which was, in spite of his weak health and the Shorter Catechism, essentially that of a Bohemian. And it was, therefore, to his writings that I turned in my search for a definition.

“Youth,” he writes somewhere, “taking fortune by the beard, demands joy like a right”; and the essay entitled “Crabbed Age and Youth,” in “*Virginibus Puerisque*,” is a spirited defence of those illogical enthu-

siasms that are so dear to Bohemians, and so much condemned in any man:

"Youth is the time to go flashing from one end of the world to the other both in mind and body ; to try the manners of different nations ; to hear the chimes at midnight ; to see sunrise in town and country ; to be converted at a revival ; to circumnavigate the metaphysics, write halting verses, run a mile to see a girl, and wait all day long at the theatre to see *Hernani*."

I feel that these two quotations contain the root of the matter, and I would venture to suggest that the Bohemian is the man who demands joy most passionately, whose enthusiasms are least logical, in fact that the Bohemian spirit is the quintessence of youthfulness. Thence follows as a matter of course the acceptance of the motto "Life for Life's sake," that effort to obtain from every moment of existence a perfect expression of life, which stirs the Bohemian to a constant sense of his own vitality, and lends to his most trivial actions an air of consciousness so manifest that they must needs be interpreted by the sleepers and the half-dead as

fragments of an indecently scornful pose. Full of a sense that he is making history for his old age, he tastes life as a man tastes wine, and he mixes his drinks; so that if you see him roysterer in a tavern to-day you may depend upon it he will be reading fairy-stories to a nurseryful of babies to-morrow.

Of course, the charge of selfishness may be brought against this ideal of Bohemia, just as it has been brought against every ideal that man's heart has ever coveted. But it must be allowed that the Bohemian has certain very definite and admirable human qualities in a marked degree. He loves to make sacrifices, though, as may be said of others besides Bohemians, he had, perhaps, rather do good to his neighbour than that his neighbour should be done good to. He has a passionate fondness for beauty, and an aptitude for discovering it in unlikely places. Finding how often the things he likes himself are condemned, he achieves a youthful tolerance only lacking in discrimination. And, having regard to this tolerance, every honest intelligent young man

ought to be thus far a Bohemian, for he can condemn nothing of knowledge but only of impulse, and of all things he should hate intellectual priggishness most. The experience will come and he must drop out of the number of the elect, but he has won his spurs, and the glamour of his genial knighthood will be with him for ever.

And, indeed, it were wise if, as our promising youths were once wont to make the Grand Tour before settling down to the business of life, they were now, one and all, to visit this bitter-sweet country of Bohemia—sweet because it is the ultimate expression of youth, bitter because, like youth itself, it is evanescent. For, as a reformed spendthrift makes the best of misers, so a man who once upon a time has lived ten years of his life in one eager year may be trusted to exercise a just discretion in the difficult matter of living ever after. And further, Bohemia is a school in which a man can supply those parts of learning which his more formal education will not have touched. He may learn here the merits and defects of excess, the critical value of

laughter, the breadth and glory of the country we call life, the cheerful habit of open speech, the joys of comradeship and the necessity of examining a convention before accepting it, even if his great-grandfather has tried it and found it good before him. He will become wise in drink, careless in tobacco, and tolerant of bad food if only it be cheap. From hearing unknown poets recite their own verses he will learn that there is a wealth of unpublished poetry in the land, that there are other men besides himself and the handful of poets in "Who's Who," for whom life is a beautiful story even if it have no moral. And perhaps, most necessary of all, he will come to believe that knowledge itself is of small account, but that in the power to learn lies the strength of a man's mind.

Perhaps not all the Bohemians with whom he may come in contact will be to his liking. For here, as elsewhere, you will find charlatans, since the one vice undreamed of in Bohemia is shrewdness, and the inhabitants fall an easy prey for a time. But a State which demands constant sacrifices of its

children cannot content knaves long, and they soon scuttle back to their kin with pocket-books stuffed with lies and an air of happy escape. Then, too, the saddest thing in all Bohemia, the old Bohemians, the Peter Pans who will not grow up, may disturb his peace of mind for a while with their reckless jollity and their air of great opportunities wantonly missed. But so benign a spirit does Bohemia inspire in its patriots that it is quite probable that they will lead him aside and warn him against permitting his adventures to become habits, with pointed references to their own lives. And on the whole he will spend the happiest time in his life. He may be in London, or Paris, or Belfast—it does not matter where, for Bohemia exists where Bohemians are, and cafés or suburbs have as little to do with the true Bohemian spirit as untidy clothes and neglected barbers. Of course, unless he is one man out of a hundred, the splendid vision will pass and he will find himself facing civilization itself in the end. But by then he will be equipped with all those weapons of wisdom and tolerance that Bohe-

mia provides for its knights, nor shall he lose the old faith and the old wonder, though time has proved that the life he sought so eagerly was itself a dream.¹

Yes, for all save the unfortunate it must pass ; and yet as I sit in my castle in Bohemia and write these lines I hear the songs of the citizens rising from the street and their laughter echoing among the house-tops, and I dread the day when my palaces shall change to factories and my domes to chimneys and I shall be able to see the truth no more.

IV

DREAMING AS AN ART

IT is sometimes pleasant, when the facts of life begin to annoy us, to remember that we are only dreamers in a world of dreams. Our dreams are no less real to our minds than our waking adventures, and it is only chance that has led us to exaggerate the importance of the one at the expense of the other. If poets had been of any importance in the earlier days of the world, we might easily have come to consider our waking life as a pleasant period of rest for the emotions, while cultivating our dream pastures, till their roses became like crimson domes and their lilies like silver towers under the stars. But the hard-headed men who could throw brick-bats farther than their neighbours had, I presume, the ordering of events in those far dim days, and therefore to-day we all

believe in tables and scoff at ghosts ; we enjoy smoking-room stories and yawn at dreams. I might almost have added that we knight the throwers of brick-bats and starve the majority of the poets, but I would be the last to deny the justice of this arrangement, for if the former class has taken the daylight earth to itself, the poets hold in their treasuries the title deeds of the fertile pastures and purple mountains of sleep. I know who is the richer.

And if our dreams pass with the morning, it is no less true that our realities pass with the coming of sleep. We see a man fall asleep in a railway carriage, and our illusory faculties tell us that he is still there, while he himself, who should surely know, is only too well aware that he is being chased by a mad, white bull across the Bay of Biscay. Probably he will return to the railway carriage presently, but meanwhile the bull and the blue waters are as true for him as his stertorous body is for us who lament his snoring. And why should we prefer our impressions to his ?

The point is important, because in sup-

porting the claims of the dream world against those of our waking life it is necessary to meet the case of the man who says : "I should soon come to grief if I took to dreaming." As a matter of fact (and this throws some light on the life histories of our poets) it seems impossible to be successful in both worlds. We all know the earthly troubles that overtake dreamers, and I am willing to wager that your Jew millionaire goes bankrupt half a dozen times a night in his sleep, where all his yellow money cannot save him. Probably, if you cultivate the art of dreaming, you will pay for it under the sun, but whereas our chances on the earth are limited by our opportunities, the lands of sleep are boundless and our holding is only limited by our capacity for dreaming. There are no trusts in dreams.

Next it is necessary to consider how far it is possible to command our dreams at will, and this, I think, is very largely a matter of practice. At first hearing, most people would think a man who said that he could dream when and, to a certain degree, whatever he wanted, untruthful. But

the effects of opium on the practised eater are known to every one, and cucumber and lobster salads have been calculated in terms of nightmares to a nicety, and while deprecating these more violent stimulants, I am sure that by choosing a judicious daylight environment, the will can be brought to bear almost directly on our midnight adventures. I may refer, in support of this, to the number of instances quoted in Mr. Lang's "Book of Dreams and Ghosts," of persons solving problems in their sleep which had baffled them when they were awake.

To any one who wishes to dream pleasant, if unoriginal, dreams, I should recommend a life of intellectual rather than emotional idleness. The theatre, music, flowers and novels of a badly-written, exciting character are all serviceable for this kind of dreamer, and he or she should cultivate a habit of wandering and incoherent thought. The rest, as I have suggested, is a matter of will, but I warn the unwary that the results are apt to be surprising.

For, after all, except possibly in certain cases of insanity, the two worlds overlap but

slightly. • Usually we can recall a small chapter of the dream we have dreamed, and in our sleep we retain a little of our waking wisdom, and that is all. From the splendid garden in which you wandered last night you brought away nothing perhaps but a flower or two, broken in waking. To-night you may be flying about the house-tops as if you had never accepted the law of gravity as a fact. And as you may not now recall the laws which govern your kingdom of sleep, you can only suggest a course for your movements therein, at the risk of finding yourself engaged in a series of very uncomfortable adventures. Owing to an effort to dream short stories after the manner of Robert Louis Stevenson, I was compelled to commit two singularly brutal murders, touched with a number of lifelike but repellent details. I know better now, for I have learnt that for me it is a rule of sleep that I should take the leading part myself, even though, oddly enough, the dream is still a work of art so far as to allow me to go back and alter incidents which do not fit in with the latter part of the story. I may

add that, owing to the extraordinary logic which binds my movements when asleep, the stories are hardly ever any good from a waking point of view, but the dreams are agreeable because I have a subconscious glow of self-congratulation on the vast quantity of work that I am doing. I think it possible that all very lazy people have this glow in their dreams, for this would account for the quite immoral happiness of the habitually idle. Moreover, it constitutes a quite reasonable defence for laziness, for no one can be expected to work all round the clock, and if a prince has been opening imaginary bazaars all night, you cannot ask him to lay real foundation-stones all day. We can, and do, punish men for preferring their labours in the other world to their labours in this ; but we have no right to call them foolish as well as criminal. Rebels against the conventional must be corrected to satisfy the majority that it is right ; but it is narrow-minded to despise them. They may be tyrants in the dim places where dreams are born.

And this brings me to the whole moral

aspect of dreams and dreaming, a point on which I would gladly write a complete article. It has often been noticed that in dreams we have no sense of right or wrong ; but as we have also no control over our actions, it would seem that it would not make much difference if we had that sense. Our movements appear to be guided by a will outside our own bodies, and to a certain extent, at all events, this will is the will of the normal daylight man. It is quite possible to regard our dreams as a kind of dramatic commentary on our waking life, or as an expression of the emotions which the intellect has forced us to suppress in that life. If this be so, we ourselves are more real in dreams than we are when awake, however fantastic or ridiculous those dreams may appear to our conventional minds. And if the last art of living is to express ourselves as we are, it would seem that the whole duty of man is to dream. Perhaps when we have at last come to understand ourselves well enough to complete a Utopia, our unconventional lives will be devoted to a number of simple daily preparations for the full en-

joyment of the dim world which I believe we can make as we will, and perhaps our true reward for the pains and uncertainties of our little lives is the place where beauty and joy follow desire as the night follows the day.

V.

ON FACTS

ONCE upon a time a small boy was appointed to the honourable position of lift-boy in one of those amazing blocks of flats which insult the blue sky from the northern heights of London. One of his duties was the calling of cabs, and he was entrusted with a whistle for that purpose. "You blow once for a four-wheeler, twice for a hansom, and three times for a taxi," said his instructor. "And if I blow four times?" queried the boy, who was of an adventurous turn. "Ah!" replied the man, "you blow four times for a hearse!" Time passed, and, while it often fell to the boy's lot to fill the street with yearning appeals for cabs, Death must have spared the mansions, for the boy was never asked to call a hearse. Sometimes, in fun, he would place his whistle to his lips and

endeavour to sound four blasts; but his courage always failed him after the third, and these adventures would end merely in war-like dialogues with jobbing chauffeurs. At length, as the boy stood in the street one night whistling vainly for a taxi-cab, a motor-car struck him from behind, and as he fell the fatal fourth blast startled the street with its pain. And later there came a hearse.

In the crinoline days, this story, with a little judicious amendment, would have become a truculent tract on the perils that await the disobedient ; now, when we have so much sense, it only suggests that if motorists do not sound their horns, they run over adventurous little lift-boys.

But perhaps I may be forgiven if I derive from it the moral that the danger of being dogmatic lies in the fact that other people will probably attach much more importance to our dogmatisms than we do ourselves. A man with a fondness for alliteration may pause in a nursery to remark that the fairies of the future will be very fat, and then forget all about it. But it is quite likely that he

has left a nightmare of supernatural fat in the minds of the children, and that their dreams will be disturbed with visions of loathsome fairies with pantomime paunches and financial chins. So various abhorrent bogles used to make the darkness hideous in our knickerbocker days, while the ingenuous Olympians who had invented them went blithely about their pleasures. It is true that as we grow up we cease to accept these purely æsthetic torments ; but science is ready with very efficient substitutes. Many unhappy people drag out their wretched lives on wholemeal bread and sterilized milk, breathing but little for fear of microbes, and wearing garments of loathsome texture and appearance, while their doctors carouse on lobsters and radishes in dressing-gowns of amber silk. A philosopher may be a humbug, and even a Justice of the Peace may be immoral ; but their oratorical wisdom will pass for truth with many, and our publicists can pay for their private vices by condemning society for its sins.

Of course, men and women accept rules because they appear to make life easier. The

doctors tell us that if we get our feet wet we catch a cold, and we believe them, because we hope that by keeping our feet dry we may be spared this calamity. But, in the interests of their profession, the medical men have chosen a cause which no ingenuity can render uncommon. The really wise man, therefore, would dishonour this rule, and believe that he only caught colds when there was a total eclipse of the sun visible at Greenwich. I am prepared to listen patiently to the learned arguments of my family physician, but in my heart I know that the doctors discover the cure first, and that it is only after that fortunate event that Nature moves herself to invent the disease. And, if the doctors have afflicted me with neuralgia and hereditary gout, I am well aware that Samuel Smiles has made me lazy, and that certain dim moralists have made me vicious. I bear these worthies no grudge for assailing my mind in its experienced days, and slaying the bold, bad rebel before he could stretch his wings. To-day I wear clothes and eat bacon and eggs for my breakfast, and perhaps one day I shall have a villa

all of my own on the sunny side of the Brixton Road. If they had not told me so many comfortable things, I might—who knows?—have eaten honeycomb on the lower slopes of Parnassus. Yet I say that I bear my kindly instructors no grudge. There is a policeman in uniform before my door, and no man may smite me with death before that grim figure and escape punishment. And therefore I know that I must not kill those whose politics differ from mine ; and it is always a comfort in these complex days to know exactly what we may not do.

I have in my mind the picture of a poor, law-abiding fellow who dropped dead in Regent's Park because he found that he had innocently disobeyed a notice which forbade him to walk on the newly-sown grass. For years and years, I suppose, he had seen those curt prohibitions, and never dreamed of questioning their authority. I like to think that his last breath was sweetened with the wild, sweet wine which tints the lips of rebels. And perhaps there is a little envy in the thought, for I own that I dare not walk on the grass, even by accident. In

truth, this is no paradox, for my flesh is so overwhelmed by the value of authority, that, even though my brain wandered in moonlit gardens, my legs would not disobey the London County Council. It is so easy to do what we are told, so hard to forget and begin the business afresh. And, to make the matter complex, there is generally some measure of reason in these artificial limitations. Once on a wall at Hampstead I saw written the loveless truth, "Alcohol limits the productive powers of the worker." It was, I think, a fair summer day, but my spirit sank at once in a mood of November greyness, and Omar himself could not stay my sorrow that all our merry nights of wine should end in this. The soul of the man who first indited that bitter truth might rise no more from the dregs, and even we who came after were influenced by his penitent morbidity. Yet, on examination, the thing proves to be but half true. Alcohol is but one of the thousand emotional stimulants that interfere with our work. Love, flowers, the spring winds—everything that glows under the skies—is in the conspiracy against our

absurd labours ; but the fool, I suppose, could see nothing but the alcohol in the avoiding of which lay his poor hope of salvation. Yet he was as reasonable as most dealers in dogma, and I see his words in every joyous bottle.

Facts are rules to which the great common sense of the majority will allow no exceptions, and the chief end of man would appear to be to impart facts to his neighbour. We are even asked to believe that the accumulation of these tiresome limitations is a virtue and their distribution a duty, and so there are always anxious persons at our elbow to tell us things which we do not wish to know. There is a charming Scotch ballad, of which the first line runs, "O waly, waly up the bank," and Palgrave informs us gravely that the root and pronunciation of the word waly are preserved in caterwaul ! Only less criminally selfish is the man who tells me the way to Camden Town, and thus robs me of a walk through an enchanted city.

Sometimes, looking at the sky on a fine night, and remembering how Coleridge was able to see a star within the horns of the

moon, a feat no longer possible to well-informed persons, I wonder whether the next intellectual revolution may not be directed against facts. Their influence on art can only be bad ; their influence on man may easily be measured in terms of fear. I want to blow my whistle four times before I am choked.

VI

ON KNOWING LONDON

THERE are a great many ways of knowing London, and there is something to be said in favour of all of them. There is the way of Walter Besant, who knew mediæval London better than his own, and found it again in Rouen. There is the way of Mr. E. V. Lucas, who knows all about people's houses, little and big, and that of Mr. F. M. Hueffer, who has threaded the thrills of London on a string like beads. Then there is the useful man who knows the colours of 'buses and the characteristic smells of tubes, and the botanist who can discover window-boxes and roof-gardens where even the birds may hardly suspect them. More frequent is the man wise in taverns and those queer cellars where dim persons play dominoes and drink coffee. The specialized topo-

graphical knowledge of policemen, cabmen, and postmen is of a professional character, and so is that of the flower-girls and the gentlemen who pick up the tips of cigars and cigarettes. I suppose the acrobats who mend telephone-wires and the man on the Monument who lets out telescopes on hire, know more about the roof-tops than the pavements. Theirs must be a London of hazardous precipices and little, still lakes, of sooty solitudes and noisy craters.

But when the learning of these and a hundred other classes of students has been examined, there remains the interesting problem of the manner in which the normal, unmethodical Londoner is acquainted with his city. He has been often blamed because he does not rush round and see the sights, like the rapt American tourist. It has been said, with a great deal of truth, that he does not visit the Tower of London or Westminster Abbey or the British Museum ; yet when a cab-horse lies down in the Strand, a thing that happens every day, the police must work hard to prevent a crowd of eager spectators from blocking the street. At first sight this

seems blameworthy, and yet in truth a cab-horse reposing in the Strand is more representative of modern London than all her public buildings, and possibly Londoners sub-consciously realize this. Strangers are naturally anxious to see the things that make our city a fine city ; but we who call it home, are hungry for the things that make our city London. We have seen cathedrals and museums and picture-galleries in other places, but our crowds, and our policemen, and our cab-horses, are ours alone.

It is this familiarity with what may be called the essential details of London life that constitutes the civic knowledge of nine Londoners out of ten, and the guide-book wisdom of a foreigner can hardly hope to rival our subtleties. He may know the mummies of the British Museum very well, but the pigeons at its gates are our brothers, and not his. He may speak learnedly of the Great Fire and Christopher Wren, but he has not dropped orange-pips from the top of the Monument as a child. He may regard the Embankment monolith with a mind attuned to hieroglyphs, but he cannot know

that the children of the pavement call it Clara Patrick's Needle. Yet it is these things, or their like, that we call to mind when we think of London. Now and again, it would seem, London takes her infants by the hand, and it is in these rare moments that we arrive at our finer knowledge of her ways. It is something to have seen the great panorama unroll itself from Hampstead Hill ; it is something to have steamed from Putney to Southend on a straining tug ; but for some the lights of the Euston Road in fog, for others perhaps the uneasy flicker of winter dawn on the flowers at Covent Garden, hold more of London than it all.

And so this intimate knowledge of their city, common to all true Londoners, becomes individual in its direct expression. I remember a London shopkeeper, miserably convalescent at Hastings, who showed me an old County Council tram-car that was used by the fishermen for storing their nets on the beach, and there were tears in his eyes because it still bore the soft names of beloved southern suburbs ; and, though my heart was in the north, with Euston and Hamp-

stead and Camden Town, I gave him my sympathy freely. He told me that he liked the smell of orange-peel, and was sorry that the custom of eating the golden fruit in the galleries of theatres was dying out. Though his tram-car had failed to appeal to me, there was something in that to make me home-sick. I, too, had loved the smell of oranges, and, answering his recollection, I saw Farringdon Market drift out along the beach, and the light of the naphtha flares pass in smoke to the sea. But why had I no school books?

It takes more than oranges and tram-cars to give definition to the picture we have drawn on our slates. These things might conceivably represent Manchester to an inhabitant of that city, and we are citizens of London. It is rather from certain ecstatic moments that we derive our impressions than from any continuous emotional process.

Thus I have seen an escaped monkey sitting on the head of Robert Burns in the Embankment Gardens ; I have heard a tipsy boy sing so sweetly in a large West End café that all the women broke down and cried ;

I have been roused from my sleep by a policeman to find that a neighbouring fire had cracked my bedroom windows ; I have seen a child blowing soap-bubbles in the Strand and Olympic Americans showing off outside a Bloomsbury hotel ; I have seen Mr. Bernard Shaw going westward with his beard of flax, and I have heard Mr. G. K. Chesterton laugh in a quiet street ; I have seen the merchants of London gazing with a wild surmise on Mr. Brangwyn's fresco at the Royal Exchange. From these and a thousand other similar moments I have won in some dim way my knowledge of London, and though I may know her longer I shall not know her better. It is not the number of such spiritual adventures that counts, there is a small boy at Drury Lane Theatre who has had twice as many as I—it is rather the extent to which they affect us ; and at an early age London ceased to astonish me because I had learnt to believe her capable of anything. We who live in London know that she is the City of Infinite Possibilities.

Were a dragon to ramp at Westminster, we might regard the Abbey with a new

interest, but it would not affect the Bank rate ; and, knowing this, we go about our business with a calmness that moves lovers of local patriotism to tears. Yet we are patriotic, when we are not in London. We talk about her kindly on the front at Brighton on windy nights, and the man who said that the Niagara Falls reminded him of the fountains in Trafalgar Square was not untypical of her children.

To the alien, I suppose, London must remain a kind of scattered museum, full of interesting things, not very well arranged. Yet once, at all events, it seemed to me that, to a man newly fallen from Scotland, there had been granted a glimpse of the only London that is really ours. I found him startling the echoes of the Adelphi arches with his laughter, and as he was alone in a place not greatly mirthful, I asked him a reason for his merriment.

“ Oh, I’m just laughing at Glasgow,” he said.

VII

THE POET AND THE PEOPLE

A FEW weeks ago one of the impassioned critics who tell posterity about books in the *Times* literary supplement ventured to rebuke a poet for remarking in his preface that few people take much interest in modern verse. I have lost the cutting which contained this little journalistic *jeu d'esprit*, and my heart sinks at the thought of searching for it anew in the files of the *Times*. But I may say that I could not help smiling at the noble ardour of the critic, and sympathizing with the dolorous plaint of the poet. Hardly anyone does take any interest in modern verse, and this may be proved not only by looking at the boots of poets and the penny-boxes of secondhand booksellers, but also from the most cursory examination of the columns of the *Times* itself. Now and again

it has printed a political tract in rhyme from the pen of Mr. Kipling, and I have some dim recollection of other political tracts and memorial couplets that have appeared in its columns. But I have never suspected it of any effort to print a poem because it was good.

And this lyrical reticence, which it shares with all the other morning papers, is sufficiently suggestive at the present time, when even our most dignified periodicals are fain for that popularity which has so much weight with advertisers. If the heart of the season-ticket holder were capable of being stirred by the rapt words of poets, we should see our modern editors scaling Parnassus with cheque-books in their hands, in search of the blithe singers they now successfully avoid. With smiles and courteous phrases on their lips they would ply Pegasus with ingenious dopes of flattery to rouse him to record-breaking flights. The soft titles of poems would contend on the bills with the names of criminals and co-respondents. We should have the poet's criticism of the Cup-tie final and the Boat Race and Tariff

Reform. We should hear how he wrote his poems and what he had for his breakfast. His photograph would figure in the advertisement columns, and he wou'd tell us how he cleaned his teeth and where he bought his rouge. In brief, he would be famous.

But as a matter of fact the season-ticket holder does not care a rap for poetry, and the judicious editor is at pains to imitate him. Only, since a newspaper must be cultured, he every now and then allows one of his young men to deal with a score of little volumes in a column headed "Recent Verse," and it says something for the present-day journalist that frequently the column is very well written. With the editor, in nine cases out of ten a commercial man endeavouring more or less successfully to interpret the wishes of his customers, I shall have no further concern, but the case of the average Englishman is more interesting. How is it that he, a creature of flesh and blood, eating and drinking and loving and breathing good air, does not care to see his life expressed in its highest emotional terms?

I am prepared to meet the objection that

to-day we have no outstanding poet to win the favour of the majority of the semi-cultured. For in the past the middle classes have been content to elect their own gods. They preferred Byron and Walter Scott to Keats and Shelley, and Tennyson and Coventry Patmore at their worst to Browning and Mr. Swinburne. I think it may be said that we have not discovered a Keats or a Browning among our living poets, but I feel sure that only encouragement is needed to produce a very good substitute for the Byron of "Childe Harold" or the Tennyson of the "May Queen." But it is just this encouragement that is lacking. It is not that the general taste in poetry has improved ; it has rather died a natural death, so that a poet is put to all manner of shifts to win a hearing. A friend of mine has solved the problem by visiting coffee-stalls in the little hours of the morning, and giving cake and coffee to the unemployed on condition that they listen to his sonnets. I would rather read a sonnet to a body of loafers than to the occupants of a second-class carriage in a suburban morning train.

And in this preference there lies the heart of the present problem ; it is the middle-class intellectual who has deserted the Parnassian colours, it is his defection that has made it impossible for a poet to earn a living wage, and it is not difficult to see why he has done so. When he meets his neighbour in the morning, he talks critically about the weather. At mid-day his view of the weather becomes introspective, at night prophetic. He is a kind of inexact barometer. If he be a pessimist he welcomes the sunshine that interrupts the rain ; if an optimist he deplores the rain that interrupts the sunshine. But life for him is always a matter of weather. Now, and it is failure to realize this that has made poets what they are, an Englishman talks about the weather because he is afraid to talk about anything else. He feels that in all other topics there lurk vague perils. To admire scenery is affected, sociology is coarse, the drama vulgar, politics violent, religious discussion blasphemous, and so on. But to remark that we really do have extraordinary weather in England is at once good-citizenship and sound im-

perialism. Therefore the poet, when he does happen to reach the ears of the lords of middle-class homes, annoys them very much by his un-English lack of reticence.

As every tradesman knows, there is a fortune for any one who can please the great middle-classes, and, as in a dream, I can see a race of poets springing up and waxing fat by means of their subtle power of expressing the real emotions of the backbone of England. They will make epics of wind and rain and sudden hail, or in lighter mood they will weave ballades of fog and triolets of mud. Their works will be largely quoted in the suburbs and on the platforms of railway stations, and as literature will form part of ~~the~~ curriculum of private schools. To know them will be a sign of culture, and to own the weather anthologies will stamp a man as an intellectual. Once more, so my dream runs ecstatically, poetry other than limericks will be good form, provided always that the poet observes his anti-cyclones and keeps a wise eye on his depressions. Poets will have harems and motor-cars, and nice things to eat and drink, and their poetry will

not suffer, for even now the finer luxuries of the rich are the mere necessities of poets. The Poet Laureate will have a larger income than any of the able office-boys who form governments. By virtue of his rank he will be able to go to pantomimes and music-halls without paying for his seat or his programme, and 'bus conductors will know him by sight. He will form one of the select group of great men who answer the conundrums of the day. *The Times* will print his verses.

Of course, this is only a beautiful dream, a dream too beautiful to develop into a concrete fact. And it must be recognized that the responsibility for the present neglect of poetry lies chiefly, in an age that loves the word efficiency, with the poets themselves. Writing once before upon this matter, I put forward the perfectly reasonable suggestion that poets should have their poems sold in the streets at a penny each. This would manifestly be good for the poets, and also for the happy English homes that gained their songs. But I only succeeded in drawing a correspondent who accused me of en-

couraging "shrieking versifiers." I utterly mistrust the poet who does not want everybody to read his poems, just as I utterly mistrust the poet who prates about the dignity of poverty, and does not want lots of money to spend. An artist without vanity is like a rocket without a stick, and a poet who does not long for every kind of emotional excess is a coward. To live happily in an attic nowadays, when money can buy so many different kinds of roses, is the sign of a deficient imagination. It is true that the poet's strength lies in his dreams, but he can always start dreaming where life leaves off. If he has a motor he will desire wings; if he has an airship he will long to sail through the passionless seas of space. You cannot weary a man of nectarines by giving him apples.

And now, after, I fear, an excess of errant flippancy, I come to my point. Poets must be supported by the State, and handsomely supported in order that they may cultivate their bitter-sweet disease to advantage. I calculate that the cost of one *Dreadnought* would provide an annual sum sufficient to keep twenty

poets from emotional starvation. Probably, since England is what it is, they will have to be chosen by competitive examination, but once chosen they must have complete liberty to waste their lives as they will. Probably three-quarters of them will thereafter be content to lead pretty lives and write no more ; possibly the others will turn out a few decent lyrics. But the moral effect of State recognition of the value of poetry will be enormous. For the moment the middle-classes discover that there is money in poetry, they will respect poets and buy their works and their portraits. Surely this desirable end were cheaply attained at the cost of one battleship !

VIII

PENSIONS FOR POETS

A FEW weeks ago I wrote an article, in which I suggested the wholesale pensioning of English poets. I stated my case flippantly for the reader's sake, but I had quite a serious purpose of my own. I think poets, or for that matter any one who devotes his life to the unremunerative production of beautiful things, should be handsomely supported by the State. We reward the persons who make oil-cloth and umbrellas and things of that sort. We supply policemen to take care of their houses, and *Dreadnoughts* to defend their factories. We put crests on their spoons, and let them adopt the names of pleasant English villages in place of their own. We even create Bishops in case the souls of manufacturers should have been injured by their own machines. But for

the poets, who are really the designers of the umbrellas and oil-cloth of to-morrow, we do nothing whatever. They have no homes or factories, or spoons, and their souls are beyond the reach of Bishops. The expensive little systems that guard our conventions are merely tiresome limitations to them. All that we can give them is the gold that they alone know how to spend, and this we withhold.

I feel a certain diffidence in approaching the presumed suicide of John Davidson, partly because nearly every one else who has written about it has annoyed me, and partly because I cannot quite understand his motive. It has been assumed generally that the immediate cause of his suicide was ~~lack~~ of money, and one might deduce from his last letter that for another hundred or two a year he would have been willing to continue living and writing poetry. There is something significant in the Wordsworthian simplicity of that ideal dinner that he designed before leaving home for the last time. Potato soup, boiled beef, and rice pudding are all good things in their way,

but the combination is the meal of a feeder rather than an eater. I can find a certain dignity in the man who rejects life because it holds for him no truffles or April strawberries ; but, in all sympathy, it is ridiculous to commit suicide because one cannot have enough rice pudding. Poets kill themselves because they have not got ten thousand a year with which to exhaust the emotional possibilities of concrete pleasure ; no one would voluntarily cease from living for lack of a plateful of potato soup.

And it was this consideration that made me smile at Mr. William Watson's passionately sympathetic letter to the *Times*. England does starve her poets ; but, on the whole, it is better that she should do so than that she should make them a pauper's allowance of boiled beef and rice pudding. It was Chatterton's stricken vanity and not his hunger that made him hurry so, and I feel that the same might almost be said of Davidson. He was one of those unfortunate people who believe that they have a message to convey to the world ; forgetting, perhaps, that it is impossible to convey messages to

a stomach. The bitterness of the unhonoured prophet is cumulative, and in the end his message smashed John Davidson. If it had been the ordinary man with an idea in his head, or, in polite English, with a bee in his bonnet, we should have heard little about it ; but it happened that he was also a poet, and rather a big poet. So all the little newspapers danced on his body, and the constant readers asked why he did not try to earn an honest living when he found that poetry did not pay. There is no need to answer such asses ; they shall burn in any hell of mine until they are weary of pain itself. For the rest, it may well be that the prophet Davidson grew weary of waiting for the tardy ravens ; but it is certain that the poet, the man who wrote the "Ballad of a Nun" and the "Runnable Stag," did not kill himself for lack of an extra hundred a year. Nor, indeed, is he dead.

The case of John Davidson has reminded the journals of to-day that poets may have a kind of sentimental value, and that it may be creditable in a country to save her singers from starving. But in discussing the

question of State support, they admit, sensibly enough, that no officially appointed body could be trusted to distinguish the sheep from the goats, the singers from the amiable persons who ought to write prose. The tests any such body would apply would be the kind of tests that govern the admission of strange young men to suburban drawing-rooms, and we should end by having twenty poet laureates where now we suffer but one, while the Ernest Dowsons and Francis Thompsons would continue to inherit the gutters of London. This is so certain that I cannot blame the leader-writers for shelving the problem until the next young poet makes himself into a rondeau with strychnine, or blows his brains into a rosy lyric. Nor do I think it matters, for I do not believe that two hundred and fifty a year would do any poet any good, and I doubt whether the present age is sufficiently enlightened to pay its poets more. Such an income represents compromise, and compromise is bad for poets. There is a type of poet that can do very good work in prisons and doss-houses ; there is the other

type that wants to pelt expensive actresses to death with orchids and drive over cliffs in amber motor-cars ; and between these two ideals of spiritual and physical asceticism there lies respectability and the whole tragedy of modern English poetry. I suppose Wordsworth and Tennyson and Browning have something to answer for, but when I see most of our modern young poets I long to make them drunk on methylated spirits. They are so neat and tame and pretty. They would find Shelley odd and Burns coarse, and Villon would pick their pockets. There is no need to provide pensions for young men like these ; they can always fall back on the more dashing kind of journalism.

As for the others, an illimitable optimism is needed to believe that any Government would give ten thousand a year to a disreputable person merely because he had a gift of song. Yet this is what we must do if we are going to concern ourselves with the worldly welfare of poets at all. I am not so much concerned with the possible effect of this living wage on their work, though one may be permitted to wonder

what Shakespeare or Burns or even Stevenson would have written if they had been really well-to-do. What charms me is the thought of how delightfully the poets would spend the money.³ They would not, as most rich men do, so order their scale of living that they hardly had a penny for those inessential extravagances that are essential to children and the elderly wise. Nor, if they were the right sort of poet, would they wholly forget the coffee stalls of Bohemia in the wine cups of Utopia, though I trust that they would forget the coffee.

And their dreams. . . . It is really pitiful to reflect what a lot of time our poets waste in dreaming that they have motor-cars and yachts and music-halls of their own, when the possession of these trifles would enable them to solve the riddle of the universe in a lifetime or so. Our poets have always been underfed, and, in consequence, they have given us a great account of life, like the hungry boy who flattens his nose on the cook-shop window and thinks nobly of sausages. A generation of fat poets would alter all that, and perhaps would shake our

state of material contentment. To-day we are so sure of ourselves that we are prepared to classify miracles as they occur. I can imagine some one running from the bed of Lazarus to a present-day drawing-room, with the news that a man had just been raised from the dead. The twentieth century would comment, "Oh, in America, I suppose," and Lazarus would creep gladly back into his grave. The satisfied are damned because they need no faith, and nowadays in this sense nearly everybody is satisfied ; but realizing the power of money, I think that a man who was at once a poet and rich might contrive a miracle or two to set the idiots gaping, as healthy idiots should gape, at this nightmare of a world.

I suppose this theory as to the function of poets would be called far-fetched, though I doubt whether I should secure belief if I said how far I had fetched it. But the poets themselves must be blamed if their attitude towards life is misunderstood. Once it may have been natural for poets to demand flowers and love and things of that sort ; now the true lover of Nature is the man who

wants ten thousand a year to spend on the concrete illustration of his dreams. Poets must claim this, not as a charity, but as a right; and if they do not secure it they have only to cease writing. Perhaps in a few centuries they will have their revenge.

IX

HOW TO BE A POET

MR. WILLIAM WATSON's recent timely remonstrance against the use of the term "minor poet" raises the question of the complete ignorance of the general public as to what constitutes a poet. Of course, there is no such thing as a minor poet ; it were as sensible to talk of minor dipsomaniacs or minor consumptives. A man either has the will to express himself lyrically or he has it not. If he is smitten with this bitter-sweet disease he is a poet. If he has escaped it he is just a something in the poet's background, a something that will turn to dust and then to daisies, to sway deliciously in the wind, because long ago some poet loved, or more likely thought he loved, a girl who bore the name of that flower. For, even while the minor critics are perfecting

delicately offensive phrases with which to express their contempt for those who serve the Muses, the poets are changing the venom and filth of those very critics into spring flowers and sunsets, and beautiful, hopeful things. Perhaps it is a sub-conscious sense of this magic metamorphosis that makes little critics so harsh with poets.

When a child is born to this earth it opens its lips and weeps lustily ; and yet there are persons who would deny that very young children have the gift of insight. As the days and the months and the years pass by, it is bribed into the habit of living by means of sops and trifles. When its tears incommoded its neighbours it is given sweets to hush it ; when its play is too noisy it is punished into silence. So in time it learns the great rule of compromise, and if it is a healthy, normal child it dies at three-score-years-and-ten, without ever having laughed so loudly as to awaken jealousy in its fellows, without ever having wept so long as to imply a criticism of the wisdom of the methods of God. Whether its existence has made any difference is a problem for those

scientists who can weigh dirt to the billionth part of a grain.

But now and again there is born a child whose tears may not be stayed with sweets, whose laughter triumphs over chastisement. Walking a little aloof, singing and laughing and weeping, it troubles the great silence that lulls the hearts of men. It flouts the idol that its fathers have served for generations ; it worships a wind-torn poppy that only a reaper's whim has spared. While other children grow more and more akin about it, every day seems to set this child farther from its neighbours, every day it grows more like the flowers and winds and the trees of the world. And so while the children of civilization grow old and pass, it stays among the hills and silent places and does not die. On the world of men and women into which it would seem to have wandered by mistake its influence might be ignored. And yet for centuries the young man shall woo the maidens with the love and the song that it gave the world, and the maidens themselves shall have wide eyes and crimson lips, because it was so that the

wonder-child liked them to be. Of such children are the poets.

To divide humanity into groups and put each group to bed with a sweeping generalization is a popular but dangerous amusement, and especially is it deadly to provide verbal paramours for the group of splendid accidents we call poets. In the first place, it is not easy to say what a poet is. I suppose most definitions would imply in some way or other that he was a writer of poems. But even here there is a doubt. The desire for expression exists in so many different degrees. For instance, Edward Fitzgerald was satisfied with the compliments of a small circle of intimate friends, while poor John Davidson wished a nation to accept his truth. I can conceive a man devoting his whole life to the effort to express himself lyrically to one person, a woman perhaps. What a fine thing it would be for a poet to pass his hours in writing the eternal song on the heart of a girl; and what a fine girl! It seems ridiculous to suppose that if Shelley had never learnt how to write he would not have been a poet.

Yet if we admit that a poet need not write poems we must allow that nearly every one is at times a poet, and so in a sense nearly every one is. I heard a story the other day of a little London child who was taken out to the country for the first time, and set down in a field to play. She looked about her in a dazed way at the green fields and hedges, and then was physically sick. If that child had possessed the gift of verbal expression she would have written a poem ; but even so I doubt whether she could have paid Nature a finer compliment than this. I have noticed that in moments of great sorrow the uneducated achieve a singular dignity and felicity of phrase, and it is reasonable to suppose that it is their ignorance of craftsmanship rather than any lack of emotional force that prevents them from expressing themselves lyrically. In spite of our stultifying civilization there are a few superlative moments in the lives of every one which only failure to acquire the habit of writing verse prevents them from expressing in poetry.

But apart from the joy of believing that

there are possibilities for good in every one, it must be acknowledged that this latent poet is so firmly suppressed in the bosoms of the respectable that he might almost as well not be there at all; and we are therefore justified in demanding that to earn the title of poet a man should write poems. Beyond this the adjudgment of poets always seems to me a question of how far the individual poets have succeeded in expressing the ego of the critic. Thus I probably think far too much of Dowson because he wrote "Cynara"; a poem, however, which only the maddest of prigs could call minor. And similarly, while I own to loving Francis Thompson for his poems about children, it is a poem called "Memorat Memoria" that takes my breath away, because I am one of the very unfortunate persons who really know what it means. Yet I know both Dowson and Thompson did much better work than this. This is the difficulty, this conflict between the emotional and the intellectual judgments, that must always trouble critics who endeavour to divide poets into classes, saving always those god-like critics who own to no emo-

tions, and may therefore be safely permitted to bore each other till 'newspapers cease to appear. It is not always the so-called great poets who knock us off our intellectual perches. There lies beside me a little volume of poems published exactly fifty years ago by Thomas Ashe, a name that, till I looked between the covers, bore for me only the dimmest significance. Yet there are surprisingly beautiful things in that little book, and I think a modern poet could make a reputation in this untuneful age by reproducing his curiously individual music. Critics of poetry are nearly useless, because their blood, save by rare coincidence, can never run the course of yours or mine.

And now, I suppose, the time has come to justify a title, carefully calculated to strike the thoughtless as impertinent. For while I should hesitate before giving advice to would-be engine-drivers, the question I have undertaken to answer seems to me an easy one. "Take something," I would say to the young man desirous of Parnassus, "take anything and love it!" and thereafter, if he were a child of his century, I should

have to tell him of love, the rude, uncivilized force that has inspired all the deeds worth doing, that has made all the things worth making. I should tell him that it was nonsense to speak of anything or anybody being "worthy of his love," that the question was whether he could make his love worthy of any shadow of an idea that might penetrate his education. I should tell him——

To what end? That he might see life as he would have made it, and weep his years away; that he might find beauty and fail to win it; that he might cry his scorn of ugliness on the hills and have never a hearer for his pains? Pooh! it were kinder to let him snore with the others. There are too many unhappy people already.

X

TRAITORS OF ART

PROBABLY every one remembers Swift's famous essay on a broomstick. But it is to be feared that this, which was thought a masterpiece of ingenious fancy in its time, would pass unnoticed in these sophisticated days. For, nowadays, everybody writes about broomsticks, and indeed the writer who does not do so is in danger of failing in that final task of belly-filling that relates the artist inevitably to the man. In other words, specialization, the art of losing the infinite in search of the finite, has become the only art that the brute many who hold the golden pieces deem worthy of reward. Treated in this way, the eternal things that thrilled and troubled our fathers become manageable, and duly subservient to the

popular will. It is difficult to patronize death, but easy to prattle of cremation and curious epitaphs. Love, resisting the steady pressure of civilizing forces, remains unmoral, but we have invented a definite morality for marriage, and it serves. Nor have we spared such semi-concrete things as the stars and the blue sky. We have weighed the atmosphere and measured the stars, setting limits to their wonder, and it would take a week-long eclipse of the sun to shake our reliance on the astronomers.

Observing that the passion for specialization and the specialist is regarded in England as tending to efficiency, it is hardly necessary to add that it is insane. The wholly efficient man, if he exists anywhere, which God forbid, is certainly insane, for a man's soul lies neither in his strength nor his weakness, but balanced feately between the two, like a ball in the hands of a child. A man without strength is an idiot, but a man without weakness would be a god—in an asylum.

In terms of life a specialist might be

defined as a person of unusually widespread ignorance, but his tragedy really lies in the fact that his absorption in one subject inevitably prevents him from knowing anything about that subject. Thus, to take simple illustrations, a bibliophile is a man who knows nothing about books ; an astronomer is a man who cannot see the stars ; a botanist is a man for whom the earth provides no flowers ; and yet it is to such folk that our modern simplicity would have us go for information. Concentration, even though it be a life-time long, can only give a man a knowledge of inessential things ; truth can only be won from those inspired moments that build up eternity. I suppose it is a too thorough acceptance of the doctrine of free-will that has led us to confuse a knowledge of facts with the realization of truth. We feel that if we learn all that there is to be known about a thing, the truth must be ours, though our very knowledge is likely to make it obscure. A man may concentrate all his faculties on an abandoned pump for thirty years, before a little dog, with a flash of

intuition, shows him how it can be made useful. The knowledge that we deliberately seek is rarely of any value; wisdom lies in appreciation of the significance of the accidental.

All this seems, perhaps, a little remote from literature, but its application to the present state of English art is only too exact. At no period of English literature have our authors been so greatly confused by what are pessimistically designated the "facts" of life. These may be divided into such natural phenomena as cold and hunger, and such generally lauded conventions as cleanliness and education, and their effect on the minds of our writers has been to make them minor prophets and great bores. Thus the persons who ought to be gratifying our taste for triolets and fairy stories think it their duty to produce didactic plays and novels, from which one would judge that the first task of man is rather to improve his neighbour than himself. The weakness of propagandist art lies in the fact that his message leads the author to pay too much attention to the whims and prejudices of his

readers. It was possibly necessary that the English people should be reminded of the "facts" that are the foundation of "Mrs. Warren's Profession," but in order to bring them home to his audience the author has spoiled his play. Mr. Shaw is a good, or, if you prefer it, a bad example of the artistic martyrdoms that will make the present literary period notorious one of these days. He has sold his soul to his conscience for a mess of unconventional morality. Certainly he does not credit the facts of which he is indeed the slave.

But this dissatisfaction with the purely honourable task of creating beautiful things is in the air, and can hardly be dismissed with a phrase. It is expressed with considerable force in the latest novel of Mr. John Masefield, who has written fine poetry before now. It has damned Mr. H. G. Wells, soured Mr. John Galsworthy, and made Mr. Chesterton frequently tiresome. It has killed Davidson, and afflicted us with the "City of Dreadful Brass" from the hand that wrote "Sussex." Only time will tell us what its influence may be on the younger men. But

to me the serious aspect of this scepticism as to the honesty of the artistic ideal is that it has made most of our men of letters traitors to their cause. I suppose that at all times there have been persons, a great many persons, who thought that the lives of artists were useless, but it has remained for the artists of to-day to say as much themselves. How can we hope to succeed in our task of teaching the men and women and the children of England to appreciate the beautiful, if we commence with the admission that beauty does not count? The so-called decadents of another age were skilled to find roses in the mud ; we, with our more wholesome, utilitarian outlook, are eager to find mud in every rose, in order to bring the blunders of civilization home to the minds of the civilized.

Lord Curzon once told a grateful audience that there was no reason why England should feel depressed, but to those of us who believe that Shakespeare, Keats, and Swinburne have done more for their country than Nelson, Wellington, and Gladstone, it matters little whether England is

sorry because there are yet worthless things to which she cannot attain, or proud of the worthless things to which she has attained. But that those men who ought to be leaders in the camp of truth should encourage her in her esteem of inessentials, that they should speak to her of the little passing diseases that they dread, when love is out in the world and the great salt winds are beating in from the sea, that is the last treachery.

I will give an illustration. I suppose, if these people have not written in vain, that the Embankment has come to be considered a kind of rallying-ground for nocturnal misery, a place where vice and misfortune rub shoulders and wait for bowls of soup. As a matter of fact, the Embankment by night is the finest thing in all London, and in some measure London's justification. I had always appreciated the sombre beauty of the river with its shadows and reflections, but it was a poet of my acquaintance who first pointed out to me the exquisite tracery of the shadows thrown by the branches of the plane-trees on the grey pavements. Given

a slight breeze to set the branches swaying, there can be nothing more beautiful than this in the whole round world. Now I confess that I have not conquered my natural aversion for all forms of human discomfort, whether exemplified in my own body or in those of other people, but let me add that in face of that lovely changing tapestry, these brief sorrows and even these brief lives seem to me of small importance. We are born to starve and shiver for a while in the gutters of life and presently we die. But beauty is eternal, and it is only by means of our appreciation of beauty that we can bear with our clumsy, rotting bodies while our life lasts. All other creeds seem to me forlorn and self-destructive.

And to the young men for whom I write, since the follies of age extend to the grave, I would commend those delicate shadows on the stones of the Embankment, as giving this sordid city life a certain eternal significance. Doubtless the loathsome details of that life threaten to choke them, as they seem to have choked most of our older artists. But while God is content to spread His beauty

beneath our feet, as He spread it beneath
the feet of Shakespeare, of Keats, and of
Swinburne, there is hope for those of us
who can see it.

XI

SUICIDE AND THE STATE

IN the “Shropshire Lad,” by Mr. A. E. Housman, a poet who alone among his loquacious kind sings too little, there is a curious expression of opinion on—one might almost say defence of—suicide. I have not the book by me, and I admire Mr. Housman too much to re-write his poem from memory, but I hope that readers will know their “Shropshire Lad” too well to need more than a reference to the poem to recall it to their memories. A young man who has become troublesome to his neighbours, and, worst of all, troublesome to himself, has closed his brief history with a bullet. “Well done, lad,” says the poet; “that was brave!”

Now, I am sufficiently the slave of an age I hate to feel a certain timidity in approach-

ing this subject of suicide, or self-murder as fat people prefer to call it. It is a thing that the normal, however broadminded they may be, do not like to discuss, for of all destructive criticism of life this is the most weighty. Other criminals, murderers, thieves, and the like, we can punish or even forgive, because we know that each one of us under unfavourable conditions might commit murder or theft ; opportunity alone makes the upright man. But a suicide does more than attack our persons or our pockets ; he injures our self-complacency and murders our vanity. We can forgive a man for boozing or creating a disturbance in the theatre of life, but we cannot forgive him for going out with a yawn before the play is over. In effect, he says, "I find your society dull and your follies do not amuse me. You are a lot of tiresome fellows !" And the devil of the business is that if the rascal is successful we cannot punish him for his impertinence. We can, and I believe sometimes do, send people to prison for failing to kill themselves, in order that they may there acquire a fuller appreciation of their fellow

human beings. But with all our wisdom we have, as yet, no certain means of chastening the untimely dead. Like the mythical woman, the suicides always have the last word in the argument, and, while we condemn their folly, we have the uncomfortable conviction that they cannot hear us.

Of course, it is impossible for any person, breathing air and holding the flowers of the world for his reward, to defend suicide, but it is another thing to suggest by our silence that suicides do not exist. We believe no man to be weary of life until he has pulled the trigger or emptied the cup. When he is dead a jury of British tradesmen breathe the word "insanity" for epitaph over his body, and then go home to dinner without any troublesome doubts as to the value of life. Yet every honest man knows that nineteen suicides out of twenty are perfectly sane. The majority lives for what life gives it, the minority dies for what life withholds ; and, while for once in a way it is possible to agree with the majority, it must be admitted that the point of view of the minority is not irrational. It is pessimism rather than

wisdom that keeps us alive ; it is optimism and not madness that leads the suicide to seek for better things in the grave.

But once it is admitted that many of the individuals who commit suicide are not only sane, but even possessed of considerable intellectual gifts, it seems natural to ask whether their lives might not be expended usefully in the service of humanity instead of being merely abandoned in dark corners. At present—it is poor civilization's only revenge—a certain stigma attaches to the family of a person who has committed suicide. But if instead of being posthumously dubbed insane or a criminal a man were said to have devoted his life to the State, we might come to feel rather proud of these unhappy critics. Let us put aside all our beloved nonsense about the sacredness of human life. Leaving the extravagant waste of war out of the question, every railway journey, every ton of coal, and every unit of electricity costs a fraction of a man's life. We achieve a greater degree of comfort by our cunning, but the colliery, the railway line, and the dynamo, all take their

toll in accidents, and part of the wages of the men we pay to work them is a greater risk of death than we run who are content to use them. Consideration for the lives of individuals has never been allowed to interfere with the convenience of the many.

Yet I can conceive the outcry of the coal-burning, railway-using sentimentalists against the foundation of a State department for the useful expenditure of the lives of those persons who are weary of an existence that it is hardly creditable to endure. But imagine the simplicity of the scheme. There would be an office in London which would-be suicides would seek in place of the gun-maker's shop or the river. Thence, after filling up a form, they would be drafted to an establishment in which they would be maintained at Government expense, and, after a week of probation, they would become officially dead. Once there, they would be beyond the reach of the law, and their wives would be free to marry again, while in cases of destitution provision would be made for the families they had left behind them. The living bodies of these dead men would then

be at the service of the State. They would be available for the doctors in place of dogs and monkeys for experimental germ-breeding and vivisection ; they could test high explosives and conduct dangerous chemical operations ; in time of war they could man steerable torpedoes or dynamite-laden aeroplanes. In fact, they could be used in any work that involved great risk to life. They would, of course, be prisoners, but it is no part of my scheme that they should be hurried into the next world by means of the ordinary prison diet. Perhaps a maximum limit would be put to their existence at the option of individual patients. But their very death might be made medically useful.

All this sounds possibly a little inhuman, but it is really only a question of facing facts. You cannot persuade a person who has found out life to continue living by giving him tracts. Personally I should have more sympathy with suicides if they killed themselves when they were very, very happy, in order to avoid anti-climax. But it must be realized that there is a minority—a minority that our growing scep-

ticism will materially increase—that finds life an intolerably tiresome business. The simplest study of the epistolary literature left behind by these persons will convince any one that they are, as a class, the vainest of creatures, and this vanity could hardly fail to be attracted by the scheme I have outlined above. It is of no use to say that people ought not to kill themselves. They will do it, and this being so, we may as well make their whim as valuable to the bulk of humanity as possible.

XII

THE AGE OF DISENCHANTMENT

LET me start by saying that my title does not refer to that delicate period in the life of a human being at which the illusions of childhood, the appealing and comfortable faith in one's elders, the belief in the benevolent care of machine-made gods fall away and are no more, and earth, vast, unknown, yet still strangely alluring, yawns before the feet of adventurous youth. For one thing, the disillusionment is never complete. The childish illusions fade, the no less visionary and delightful illusions of youth take their place, and so to our graves. But, while it falls to no individual man or woman to see things as they are, or perhaps I should say, to find that things are not, it is possible for groups of men and women, for cities, races, and nations, to achieve this morbid insight.

The units that compose the faithless, rebellious whole continue to soothe their bruised souls with the eternal legends; hope and faith and love, they say, are of the soul of man, and set him definitely apart from the lower animals who hope and love and worship around him, and for these universal qualities he will ultimately receive a glorious and especial reward. So they comfort the moment's tears, and he would be cruel indeed who should seek to deny them this weak solace for the pain of living. But, oddly, the faith of a nation seems to have no part in these personal and enduring beliefs. It appears rather to be the sum of those sombre, unshapen doubts that no man dares to express. To-day, in England, it would be impossible to find a human being who did not believe some theory, some idea, some miracle, in support of which his reason could produce no evidence. It is equally impossible to discover that, as a nation, we believe in anything whatever. We have outworn the faith of our fathers, and our eyes can discover no star to guide us anew. The age of disenchantment is now.

— Where should we seek to find the soul of a nation most clearly expressed? First, of course, in its literature, and, above all, in its poetry, though we must remember that it is always the second-rate work that shows the closest connection with the age that produces it, genius knowing no time and representing no age in particular. Secondly, I think, in its politicians, who aspire to and achieve a fine honesty of mediocrity; and, lastly, in the lives and speech of the people in general, and in the newspapers, which represent faithfully enough the interests and desires of the uneducated classes. It will perhaps be convenient if I consider these expressions of our national impulses one at a time.

And first, and most sadly, as to our literature. To my mind there is no more striking token of our national disenchantment than the abandonment by our artists of the belief in beauty for beauty's sake. This, when essentials are considered, was the faith of Milton and Shakespeare, or, to come nearer to our own days, of Keats and Robert Browning and Swinburne. Among the representa-

tive writers of our time it has been abandoned as passionately as our predecessors sought to express it. And what has taken its place? No doubt it may be said that Mr. Shaw and Mr. Kipling and Mr. Wells have a personal faith. No man can live as near space as we do without some protecting screen of belief. But under what banner of enchantment do these writers make their appeal, to what echo in the heart of man do they cry for an answer? To me, Mr. Kipling recalls the consuming folly of the first half of the South African war, and Mr. Bernard Shaw the shamed cowardice of the second half of that luckless victory. Their messages are alike contemptuous ; but Mr. Shaw despises his audience more than Mr. Kipling, and gives them more careful work. Mr. Wells is more truly representative of his day than they are, possibly because, as an artist, he is inferior to either of them. His message is the poignant cry of a race that can win to no belief. Yesterday a Fabian, to-day a Liberal, to-morrow a Tory, he is inspired by a faintly æsthetic distaste of life and ridden hard by a conscience in

which he does not believe. His view of things is negative ; I could set down fifty things that he dislikes, I do not know one thing that he appreciates. He has found out life, but he has not found heaven. He is the artist of disenchantment, the Wells at which no man can quench his thirst. I have taken these three writers (I should add, by the way, that Mr. Kipling *once* was enchanted), because they stand for modern literary tendencies ; but the case of our young poets is even sadder and more to the point. We have none.

When I come to the politicians the bitter ink in my fountain-pen turns to honey, for I am very sorry for them, even more sorry than they are for themselves. Their case is more simple than that of artists, for artists are always exceptional men, whereas politics demands of her children that, save in rare instances, they should be fiercely commonplace. The hardness of their lot lies in this : that, although they represent with passionate honesty the views and faltering ambitions of ordinary men, no one will believe in them, and under pressure of

circumstances they no longer believe in themselves. To a certain extent, no doubt, this is due to the party system; the delicate invention that commands a man who disliked Chinese Labour to believe in the nationalization of land, and a man who mistrusts Home Rule for Ireland to accept Tariff Reform. But, chiefly, it is due to the spirit of the age, the spirit that holds that all things are bad, that no act of ours can make them better, and that it is our duty to spend our lives in the attempt. We elect our representatives, and then turn our faces to the wall in the mournful belief that after all they do not represent us, and when the time comes it takes all the screaming eloquence of the newspapers to convince us that a crisis is at hand. Then we vote again, and once more return shrugging to our uneasy slumbers. Politicians to-day are the interrogation marks the nation sets in the book of Destiny. It is our doubts that return members of Parliament; they are living symbols of our lack of belief in the utility of man's endeavours.

And, lastly, we come to the people them-

•selves, the stuff that fills our houses and streets and overflows, into our gutters. To me their state of disenchantment is pitiful. They flee death and praise it, they seek pleasure and condemn it, they demand beauty and kill it. No cynicism is too wild for their lips, no act of fanatical tyranny too harsh for their hearts. It is not that they outrage literature with a pair of Northcliffe scissors ; it is not that they pay journalists to tell them lies they do not intend to believe ; it is not even that they are ceasing to go to the churches, though all these things are true. But they are forgetting how to love and how to hate, and this is the measure of their unemotional decadence. Behind their callous simulations of passion lies hidden the calculating cowardice of the financier in the same way that behind their definitions of honour there lurks the swell-mobsman who fears the cudgel of honest men. Love is degraded to the registry-office in more than word ; hatred, in itself, an affirmation of good, is recognized as unprofitable, with the policeman waiting round the corner. A cold scepticism is burning the

hearts of men and women to ashes of that desire that painted the trees green and the lips of women red, and set the stars moving over all. We are disenchanted.

XIII

ON DREAMS

SOME time ago I wrote an article in which I ventured to suggest that within certain limits we can make our dreams what we will, and that a considerable æsthetic pleasure may be derived from regarding this world of tables and chairs that surrounds us as illusory, the dream-world to which we win at nights as passionately real. It is no part of my intention to disinter that article from the cemetery of forgotten fancies, though I think it was truer than most journalism. For I realize that since then we have all lived through a short period of wakeful life and possibly many centuries of dreams, and are therefore, or so our quenchless optimism would assure us, so much the wiser. Our feet have trodden the pavements of starry palaces then unbuilt, and the walls of strange,

night-hung cities have echoed to our new-made songs. In the year nineteen hundred and eight we were children ; in the year nineteen hundred and ten we shall be old men ; to-day, we dream'.

Poets, who are the most interesting of the moving objects that inhabit the daylight world, win their curious supremacy in that world, a supremacy always disputed and always beyond dispute, by means of their imperial possessions in the world of sleep, and it is their recollection of their kingdoms under the moon that enables them to give colour and beauty of form to the grey world that holds our disillusioned lives. But, though we cannot hope to share, save at secondhand, their intense recollection of the beautiful life of sleep, we are all able to remember it to a certain extent ; and we use this partial recollection, wisely enough perhaps, not to make us discontented with our wakeful life, but to credit that life with qualities which it does not possess. I doubt very much whether many people realize how far their normal lives are affected by their dreams ; yet it is in dreams that all desires are born.

The popular phrase "as empty as a dream" is a very good example of the fairly general maxim, that to be successful a phrase must convey a definite untruth. Dreams are not empty ; indeed, I can conceive no human experience that less deserves that contemptuous adjective, for sometimes in a night of dreaming we live a hundred lives. Nevertheless, the popular contempt for the dreamer, the man who allows his love for the beauties of the sleep-world to dull his realization of the ugly facts that constitute life, is founded on something more than a misleading phrase. Deep down in the heart of every man you will find the instinctive conviction that life, despite the generous praises of the dying, is a monotonous task that it is very noble of us to perform. From this it is but a step to the assumption that enjoyment is somehow immoral, a belief silently held by nearly every one, and not least by the pleasure-seekers themselves, and that happy people are evading their duties. It is this intense belief in the divinity of our secret discontents that is called *joi de vivre*.

Now, looking round the world, I can find

no man more happy, and, therefore, I suppose no man more wicked, than your successful dreamer. He is the eloquent exception to the rule that in the gratification of desire lies misery, for his desires have only to be conceived to be gratified, and for him achievement brings no sorrow. There is so great a variety of life in the world of dreams that satiety is impossible ; your practised dreamer rather finds it difficult to linger in enjoyment of his perfected conceptions, so wide a world lies ready for his adventurous feet. Nor does the reproachful attitude of patiently suffering humanity encourage him to leave his dreaming and take up his duty of life. No rich man, stricken bankrupt, is as poor as a dream-magnate in his rare moments of life-consciousness. In place of his palaces he finds villas of mud ; in place of his laughing kingdom he finds a disillusioned world ; in place of his generous courtiers he finds a people patently mistrustful of him, and, even harder to bear, secretly mistrustful of themselves. It is not to be wondered that the habit grows with age, so that the boy who can lay aside his

dreams with his marbles becomes the man who can hardly recognize the fading shapes of the concrete world.

And when we have finished laughing at a man because he will not leave his gardens of far and dreamy roses to brush his hair, perhaps we may admit that there is a note of envy in our mocking criticism of his unkempt head. There is, to snatch the obvious pun, a sorrow not wholly sweet in our partings. Without in the least wishing to insult or even ignore convention, we know that we lack the power. If, by some strange mischance, our locks were shaggy and untrimmed, two bars of a familiar tune whistled on the lips of a street-boy would suffice to send us cringing to the barber. Every normal individual believes that he can only hide the weakness of his coward soul by imitating his neighbour in inessentials ; and the result of this mutual mimicking is a mournful uniformity in the hideousness of our appearance. When we laugh at a man for looking at a golliwog, we are trying to defend our own neglect of beauty. We do not look like golliwogs, but we do look like

each other, and reason should tell us that that is worse.

Of course, it may be said that a dreamer does not ignore convention because he disapproves of it, but because he is not conscious of it; and this is true. But whether you prefer to call his rapt absence of mind weakness or strength, it must be acknowledged that it helps him to overcome a number of difficulties, the mere possibility of which is enough to keep us timorously miserable. Poverty, which might be called the daymare of humanity, only sends him more passionately to his dreaming, and it is thus with all the misfortunes of which the image holds us wretchedly wakeful. We would all like to conquer our fears, and the dreamer succeeds with a flicker of the eyelids and an inward glance at his heaped treasury. If dreaming be a weakness, as those aver who have consciences like alarm-clocks, it seems better able to conquer the facts of existence than our strength.

Yet, if we are not dreamers, we have our dreams; if we have not the ropes of stars, and purses of silver moons and golden suns

of the poets, we have not wholly valueless bric-à-brac of our own. Clear-cut moments of sleep like fragments of mediæval carving ; faces twisted with streaky clay by Japanese fingers ; wet pebbles that have caught the sun on a rainy day ; pine-trees and smooth hills and burning fields of gorse ; tinted tatters from the rag-bag of our consciousness : these things add a touch of enchantment to our most sober nights of sleep, and sometimes set us astride behind the witches to see a mad world from the back of a broomstick and flout the law of gravity. After a night spent like this it is a little absurd to damn Lord Northcliffe, Fate, and the Government because the train is two minutes late, or an egg is over-cooked. Yet the man who can build castles of moonbeams and twist ropes from sand in pyjamas, becomes a foolish and petulant child when he puts on the uniform of his kind. It is possible that his folly represents an honest effort to express his share of our common humanity, but it is folly nevertheless. I never meet a nice, clean City gentleman without wishing that he had brought his

broomstick with him. Without it he is merely a careful example of a colourless and uninteresting type. It is, I believe, bad form in the City to be individual ; but it is bad art to be an unimaginative reproduction of the conventional conception of civilized man. My mind prefers even the golliwogs and teddy-bears of humanity to these soulless picture-postcards. No doubt it is pleasant to criticise the *Daily Mail* and the Government, but to damn one's neighbour and cultivate one's individuality is a more hopeful task. But most people only do this in dreams, and as they die every morning when they wake up, we never see anything but their corpses.

My moral is that most of us live only in dreams, because when we are awake we are not brave enough to face the task of living with our unaided individualities. If we all part our hair in the middle, and wear the same silly clothes, and feign interest in the same silly things, perhaps the devil will not know us apart ; that, I suppose, would be the mediæval interpretation of our motive. Substituting our own consciences for the

devil, it stands pretty well to-day. But the dreamer, the man our every institution seems designed to punish, he also lives only in dreams, and only differs from us in that he lives twenty-four hours for our eight or ten. If, in place of his daylight dreaming, we achieved a splendidly passionate manner of life, our reproaches might be justified. But we should not blame him if he finds our petty puppet-show undignified, and our timorous art of mutual mimicry unworthy of his attention.

XIV.

NEW YEAR'S EVE

WHEN that I was and a little tiny boy—I admit that I have stolen this way of beginning an article from Mr. Quiller Couch—there was always something very precious to me in the simple ceremony of letting in the New Year and letting out the Old. Doubtless, the unwonted thrill of sitting up late, and sipping hot lemonade, which we children called punch, had something to do with the deep-breathed solemnity with which the occasion inspired me. But even now, when I am tired of sitting up late, and even more tired of punch, and, above all, when I have realized that the years grow worse instead of better, even now I cannot hear the clock strike twelve at midnight of the thirty-first of December without a quickening of the pulse, for which my reason can

supply no satisfactory explanation. I repeat that I have got beyond the folly of expecting the New Year to be any better than the Old. Indeed, the present year has given me every satisfaction, and I should probably be wiser to spend the rest of my days in the year 1909, than to fare further into the unknown. But we poor two-footed beasts have such an itch for travelling that I do not doubt that I will let in the New Year at the earliest possible moment, and kick my good friend 1909 ungratefully from my door. The New Year may prove the scurviest of fellows, yet, mad optimists as we are, we will all be there waiting for him before he is due to arrive. He will help to rob us of our brains, our teeth, and our hair. He will continue that process of decay that brings us at last to our tardy graves. He will put some of us in love and some of us in prison, but his first amusement will be most mischievous of all ; for he will hardly be five minutes old before he sets us cheating ourselves into the belief that we are about to become very fine fellows. Every one goes to bed on New Year's Eve with his hands smeared with tar

from his paving operations on the road to hell. It is so easy to make good resolutions while the bells are chiming their welcome all over the midnight sky; but it is still easier to feel foolish in the morning.

It may be questioned whether there is not an element of danger in this violent forming of impossible resolutions. A debauch of virtuous feeling overnight is apt to induce a kind of moral "hot-coppers" in the morning, and the sudden realization of the hopeless nature of their good resolutions may lead people to accept their own failings a little too readily. There is a good deal of difference between the position of the man who says: "I am wicked!" and that of the man who says: "I wish I were not wicked!" In truth, it is just as well not to have too clear a sense of how far we fall short of our own standards of morality, or we may start degrading our standards to fit our own case. When a man has solemnly formed a resolution and failed to keep it, he has done an injury to his will. It is better to improve than to form good resolutions.

These are truisms ; but the truism is a wild fowl ~~very~~ seasonable at this time of the year. It is generally admitted that the resolutions made on New Year's Eve are difficult or impossible to keep, and we have seen that this failure is bad for character. "What then?" I can conceive the conscientious reader asking, "what, then, am I to do next Friday when the bells are tolling out the Old Year, and I am feeling solemn and uplifted?" Really, the question is a little difficult to answer. It might not be a bad plan to make a few good resolutions on behalf of other people ; to resolve, for instance, that Mr. Bernard Shaw should write no more to the *Times* ; that Miss Corelli, of Stratford, should hold her peace about matters that do not concern her work ; that the Laureate should rhyme no more ; that the Mr. Rudyard Kipling of the Jungle Books should return to us ; that writers in general should believe in their own art, and that the whole school of moral critics should rush down a steep place into the sea. Personally, I should wake up when I came to that last resolution. It would

strain even the optimism born of New Year's Eve to believe in the possibility of anything so desirable as that.

Seriously, there is something in the wind on New Year's Eve that affects most of us strangely. At no other time are we so much disposed to regard life as rather more than a series of haphazard moments. The years take ordered shape behind us, and while we regard them dispassionately we have the sense of other years no less ordered that wait our coming. The arbitrary division of our calendar assumes an almost spiritual significance. We can feel ourselves changing as the moments fall gently through the hands of Destiny, and we return to our homes after the stroke of twelve not one year but many years older. It is as though, in that moment of intense consciousness, we are permitted to catch a glimpse of the world that lies outside us. Our senses are abnormally keen ; we can feel the breath of the bumping hours ; we can hear the pulse of the world's heart. Almost it seems that our minds can detect the purpose of our strange, bewildered lives, dim, uncertain, incompre-

hensible, but yet endowing them with a new dignity, a new resolve.

After, we creep back to our hearths a little cold, with rebellious voices, our hearts struggling vainly against disillusionment. Irritating trifles swarm into our minds, and blot out our sense of the infinite.

It is time the children were in bed. Christine has obviously caught a cold. We must remember to put 1910 at the head of our letters. The dream is over.

So far I have been content to consider the case of those who observe the coming of the New Year with proper ritual, but there are others. For my part I think that the man who lightly misses an opportunity of resting for an instant from the whirl and babble of our breathless lives is much to be pitied, and, therefore, I patronize with my sympathy all those lost creatures who snore the New Year in in bed, and shout it in in restaurants. I have welcomed it in many places, but, like Christmas, it comes perhaps with the best grace in the country. Nevertheless, one of the most impressive New Year's Eves I remember was spent on the

balcony of a London flat, when the year came swaggering in with such a jangling of bells that the fine lady of Banbury Cross was nothing to him. After all, the spirit is always more important than the environment ; the great thing is to stop for a moment and look one's life in the face ; nor, after all, is it such a bad thing to regard the future hopefully. It will not do the future any good, but nothing can deprive us of the thrill proper to the optimist. Let us, by all means, "greet the unseen with a cheer."

And a word in passing for the year that is gone, to come again no more. What days it has given us, what golden, magic days ! It is true that only a minute fraction of it remains with us, but that fraction is the best of all. The pride of sunny fields ; the gleam of a girl's face wet with autumn rain ; the lonely star we found in a hollow of the Sussex hills ; the fragment of song that came to us on Exmoor, how good these things were, how good they are even now ! I can sit in my chair on the brink of 1910, and think of a hundred moments in 1909 to set

my heart, beating with excitement and make my body radiant with joy of life. And so can every one of my readers, if they have a mind to. Believe if you wish that the pains of life outnumber the pleasures, but bear in mind that it is your own fault if you keep the evil and forget the good. If I could thread the stars like beads, I should make a necklace of them for my good fairy, 1909, and I should give him the sun and moon for playthings. Welcome the New Year as you will, but do not neglect to drop a tear of gratitude for the Old. What golden, magic days ! What enchanted nights of stars ! It really is a little hard to believe that the New Year will bring us anything as good.

XV

WHY WOMEN FAIL IN ART.

IN these exciting days, when women are no longer the frail, timorous creatures beloved —and shall we whisper patronized?—by our robust ancestors, it may be unwise to consider such a problem as is conveyed in the title of my article without giving at the start a definite assurance as to my appreciation of the thousand qualities of the charming sex. Personally, I confess that the spirited movement of the Suffragettes leaves me a little cold, not because I think that women ought not to have votes, but because I cannot conceive that any sane person can want a vote or find it of any use if he has it. After all, the methods employed by the militant Suffragettes are their own affair. For my part, I am afraid of hat-pins, but I have found the bright eyes of girls more deadly;

I mistrust dog-whips, but the domestic eloquence of women fills me with a greater dismay ; the anger of women is terrifying, but their tears consume me utterly. I should believe in votes for women, or even in Votes for Women, if I believed in votes at all.

And now I hope after this preliminary explanation there is no risk of my being waylaid by militant vote-seekers with a taste for letters. The argument that because women have not shone in the world of art they do not deserve a vote is foolish, because there is nothing in the life of the artist to fit him specially for the task of interfering in the misgovernment of his country. Indeed, I suppose brains are part of the artist's birthright, and they are a serious drawback in a politician, as Mr. Balfour's admirers have found. So, dear ladies, the very extent of your failure in art may be the measure of your capacity as politicians ! Is not that a pretty speech ?

There is one other kind of critic with whom I should like to deal before I take up my argument, and that is the impulsive

person who will read the title of my article, and promptly send me a queer list of names, ranging from Sapho to Gyp, from Christina Rossetti to Mrs. Hemans, from Vigée le Brun to Kate Greenaway. Now, it is true that until comparatively recent times it may have been difficult for women to achieve distinction as painters for lack of opportunity and training, but there has been nothing to prevent them from displaying their merit as writers if they had it. They have had free access to pen and ink and paper, and on the whole they have had a great deal more leisure than men in which to cultivate the most agreeable of arts. Yet, although at all times critics have erred in generosity in estimating the value of the work of women writers, it would be easier to prepare a list of a thousand men than to give one of fifty women who could be said to have produced work of definite artistic value.

Why is this? Why is it that women who can do what they like in the normal world of life should accomplish so little in the world of art? I suppose that once upon a time it would have been sufficient to mention

their family duties, and pass on serenely satisfied with the explanation; but the present-day opinion of women demands subtler reasons. I would suggest two. In the first place the motive force that drives all artists is the desire for self-expression, and I doubt whether in this sense of the word women have any self to express. Secondly, women regard life itself as a conscious art, and the pertinacity and intensity with which they develop this idea leaves them little energy for creative work. They might almost be said to exhaust their creative energies in seeking to invent themselves.

It will be seen that my two reasons overlap, so it will be convenient to consider them together. And here I must say a word about the classic perils of generalizing on women. It is always dangerous to generalize about anything, but I think it may fairly be said that it is easier to treat of women in the aggregate than to form any general conception of the character of men. Women are far more womanly than men are manly, and this is the heart of my first reason. Women always strike me as being rather representa-

tive fragments of their sex than independent human beings in a state of individual existence. In this connection it is interesting to contrast children of either sex. Boys have certain strongly-marked characteristics of their own, but they do not bear more resemblance to men than puppies do to adult dogs. Girls, on the other hand, so far as they have any character at all, are women in miniature, and as like their elder sisters as kittens are to cats. I have seen a girl-baby, six months old, practising the art of producing smiles of calculated sweetness in her cradle, while her brother, two years older, was still content with the rapt, unconscious grins of innocent childhood. It is curious that while the word "boy" still stands for pleasant youthfulness, we have to qualify the word "girl" with the epithet "little" to grant it a similar grace.

It may, perhaps, seem a hard saying that women do not exist at all, but at least I may venture that only in very exceptional cases can they claim an individual character. I do not know who first traced the resemblance between a woman and a mirror, but

whoever it may have been he had won more than an idle fancy from his reflections. Men are born with the germs of character which they develop in passing from youth to maturity. Women are born with violent instincts, but with no character that they can call their own, and they spend their lifetime in endeavouring to acquire one. Wherever they admire, they steal. "Women," said Wilde, "are sphinxes without secrets." But he did not give them sufficient credit for their skill in the construction of sphinxes. We simple-minded men may well lament over the subtlety of woman, when in all her wakeful life she has laboured day by day and year by year on that delightful work of art, herself. Her smiles, her tears, her moments of forgetfulness, all have their significance and represent hours of patient toil. Her failures are pitiful; but her triumphs are beyond those of any ordinary artist. In her highest forms her air of the unconsciousness that conceals art is perfect. She affects the simplicity of a child, the courage of a man, the fervour of a prophet, and the wisdom of Solomon, and over all she flings the cloak

of mystery that envelops the lives of those who hold high dreams. Free herself from the doubts that shadow the intellectual, she secretly despises men because 'they are not clever enough to give the credit of her work to her, and not to Nature. Sometimes, indeed, she feels the longing of the artist for recognition, and lifts the curtain, though it be but a little, to the man she loves, only to let it fall aghast, when she realizes that it is her handiwork that men love, and not herself. Perhaps in her wakeful nights she wearies of her life-long task, and mourns for the simplicity that is not hers. But dawn finds her smiling, alert, certain of herself, ready to add a new touch of colour, a new phrase, to the work that she follows dauntlessly to the very gates of death.

Looking at the pages of literary history, I am, on the whole, surprised that women have accomplished as much in pure art as they have, for at best a woman's work is never more than a secondary occupation in her life, and we have seen that her labour in her sweet task of self-creation must be terribly exhausting. No writer or painter

devotes a tenth part of the time to his work that a woman spends in carrying on the charmed traditions of her sex. And even if we endow a woman with extraordinary powers of expression we must remember that she will have little save echoes to express. She has formed an enchanted human shape from impressions of a thousand models, but beyond these skilful derivations she has nothing but the normal instincts of her sex, which Nature is over-eager to express for her. If the natural woman survive behind the mask she will express herself in children ; these are her sonnets and her love stories, her nocturnes and her autobiography. If the natural woman has perished beneath the paint, and I suspect that the death-rate amongst natural women is rapidly increasing, she will fling herself the more passionately into her task of creating the vision that decks the lives of men with the glory they call love.

Why should women write books when they can bear children? Why should women paint pictures when they can make themselves? Their work has inspired all that

is best in the art of man ; our lyric poems are but timid reproductions of their conceptions ; they make by day the dreams that we win by the light of the stars. It is possible that some of them reading this page will hardly feel flattered by this perfectly sincere appreciation of their skill in creating their own charm. I do not know why they should be displeased. I would point out, however, that my article negates its title, for I have endeavoured to suggest that women are the greatest and most successful artists of all. It is only by the light of woman, this supreme invention of women, that men come to a sense of their own imperfections. We worship them from afar even when they lie on our hearts, and it is for love of women as women have made them that men succeed in art.

XVI

AN ELECTION-TIDE DREAM

As a lax student of many newspapers it seems to me that a great deal too much has been written about General Elections, and that this is the moment when the truly great talk about something else. I do not say that the journalists are wrong. English people seem to be very fond of elections. They would not celebrate the apotheosis of poor old Guy Fawkes year after year if they were not, but I doubt whether they are quite so fond of them as the future student of our contemporary Press may imagine. The men who can cheer lustily when they see for the thousandth time the features of Mr. Chamberlain or Mr. Lloyd George flung on a screen are few and far between. We others, whose political enthusiasms are less god-like, may well

plead election headache after several days of strident democracy and aristocratic hubbub.

And, fortunately for the average patriot whose lungs and ears and degree of patience are only normal, there are more leisurely joys than those of a General Election ; there are quieter kingdoms than the fierce world of party politics. It is possible to steal away from the argument, about it and about, to some pleasant field of dreams where it is no crime to lie and take one's rest, and where the heart may whisper without treason, *Does it matter?*

I remember reading a long time ago—was it not in the fragrant pages of the “Yellow Book”—a delightful article by Mr. Max Beerbohm on the seaside in winter. I cannot recall a word of it—hardly an idea—but an hour back the cold wind blowing in from the sea restored to me the whole atmosphere of it ; and, after all, in essays it is the atmosphere that counts. The receding tide hushed softly to me in the winter twilight ; the ribbed sand greeted my grateful feet through the soles of my town-going boots ; behind me the cliffs climbed vaguely to heaven,

showing here and there a glimmering light to remind me that I dwell in a civilized world. It was a solemn moment—one of those moments in which the individual feels at once modest and important—modest in his share of life, and important in his relationship to it. And in that solemn moment there came to me two impressions. One, as I have said, was that of having read an essay by Mr. Beerbohm a long time ago ; the other touched the ridiculous. When sea-water dries on brown boots it leaves a white deposit of salt ; I was not wearing brown boots, but, nevertheless, I recalled the appearance of that deposit. For most of our days our lives seem as meaningless as that.

Had I rested content with the peace of the dusk and my two impressions and gone home, my mind, I suppose, would have dismissed the occasion as uneventful, and this article would have remained unwritten. Instead, I gave a little shiver in criticism of the thickness of my overcoat, and walked briskly along the shore to a place where the rocks thrust rugged heads through the level sand—a place where there were pools

and seaweed and a salty smell. There is something about seaweed that takes me by the throat—something, nevertheless, that I cannot express for myself in words. Some day I fancy a writer will explain my emotion to me in an epithet or in a line and a half of verse ; but as yet I have not found the revealing phrase. It is so cold and so dead and at the same time so tenderly fragile. It lies on the shore in haphazard bunches and tresses, and you have to look at it carefully before you realize the beauty of these poor dead flowers of the sea. Men and women trample them underfoot unheeding, but children, who can see the beautiful better than we, love them and heap them high in their little pails. It may be some forgotten fairy story that links seaweed in my mind with the hair of a beautiful woman, drowned while she was still young, or perhaps Ariel gave me the image in a dream. But there where the rocks were and the seaweed with its strange, sad smell of the sea, I saw a ghost —a ghost that I thought I had laid for ever.

I will not set down her name here ; not out of respect for the dead, for she is not

dead, nor out of sentimental regard for my feelings, for I have learnt to forget her, but because, if she happened to read these lines, she had rather that I did not. In any case, I must beware of the crime of Richard le Gallienne and Sentimental Tommy, the crime of making copy out of emotions which we ought to have experienced but have not, for my ghost was a girl whom I once thought to love in the hot pride of my youth, and whom I meet no more. This is not, I suppose, the place for a philosophical dissertation on the nature of love in general, or I would make some judicious reflections on this case in particular. Say that I loved a girl who was willing to accept my friendship, the modern equivalent of the "I'll be a sister to you" of our shrewd grandmothers, say that some strange things happened, some humorous and some, perhaps, not unsympathetic, and you will have done justice to the situation. Speaking dispassionately, I should say that the really wise youth will always accept a girl's friendship in return for his love. But are there any really wise young men?

It will be seen that Fate had played an odd trick on me in sending such a ghost to charm the wintry shore ; but while my pulse quickened and my heart beat louder I was far from blaming that austere lady for her choice of a messenger. Yet, in spite of my excitation of spirit, my senses took note of the curious phenomena that are the natural order of things in the world of apparitions. The night glowed into day, the winter warmed into summer, and from the vague shadows there sprang blue sea and sky, yellow sands, and green-capped cliffs of white. I say that I noticed this change, but it did not astonish me a jot. Nor was I surprised to find that in her metamorphosis from flesh and blood to a creature of dreams my love had remained unaltered. She could hardly grow more pretty ; and why should any one be less beautiful in a dream than in real life ? My æsthetic sense went out to do her homage.

I always mistrust a man who can give a lyrical, but accurate, description of the girl he loves. True passion is never eloquent ; it stumbles vainly through the shadows of

speech in search of some illuminating and tremendous word. I can give no logical description of the appearance of my ghost. She had dark hair and a nice-shaped face, and there was something about her eyes—but I have noticed that there nearly always is something about their eyes. . . . She was sitting on a rock in the sun, and her feet were bare and shining wet from the sea. Observe how dreams improve on life! As a matter of fact, in all the long months of my passion I had never seen her feet, yet now that their silver-pink shapeliness was revealed to me in my vision I found them very well worth looking at. There is something charmingly intimate about a girl's toes. And as I drew near her my ghost raised her head, and said—— No, I cannot tell you. In truth, the dialogue that seemed so gracious and sagely witty in the light of a dream turns to the merest dust of words at the touch of my wakeful pen. As with the seaweed, and the face of my ghost, the decisive word eludes me that would enable me to give form to her message; and in the vain search for it my fancy totters to its founda-

tion, and I know that I have built my Spanish castle on the sands of doubt.

No, I have not been down to the sea this winter. I have passed the long days in a city distraught between meaningless rumours and idiotic passions. As I write a hoarse cheering breaks from the street and rattles upon the window-panes. The success of some creature of ignoble ambitions has pleased the vanity of the mob that has helped to raise him an infinitely small degree above its own level. All over the country the news will fly of another 'victory' for an army that does not exist, in a campaign that does not matter ; and other mobs will offend the air of heaven with their impertinent breath. The successful creature will strut for a while, flattered, envied, and abused by those who have given him his barren honours, and then he will pass and be no more. There will come other fools to take his place.

What though the dream leave a bitter taste on the lips of the awakened dreamer? He can fall to dreaming again, and forget the sorrow of his shattered visions ; and sooner or later, perhaps, he will find that all his

haphazard wanderings in the sleep-lit world have had a definite and assured aim ; that all ~~unconsciously~~ he has been drawing nearer to the goal of his desires. Are the elections more real, more permanent, more significant than the dream you won last night, or the sea that broke at the feet of my ghost and me an hour ago ? Where the heart is, there the treasure is also. By all means choose the substance and abjure the shadow ; but who shall say that the dream is not the shadow, the life that surrounds us, the terrible shadow of our desolate hearts ?

XVII

THE NEW SEX

I DO not wish to weary readers with yet another article on whether women should or should not have votes. In itself the problem is of very small importance, as most men and women realize that it is not votes, but opinions, that govern a country. But the "cause," as I believe the elect call it, becomes significant when it is considered, not as an isolated battle, but as a relatively unimportant skirmish in an enormously important campaign. This is the campaign that began with the conspiracy of Eve against Adam, and has developed in course of time into what is known as the sex-war, the eternal conflict between man and woman. We are told that in its initial stage the devil was on the side of women in this campaign, and cynics of the male sex would have us believe

that this is still the case. I would prefer to think that, like the immortal Dr. Bulkhead, the devil is prepared to score for either side, and that he does not fail to reap the reward of this impartiality. Both sides, impelled by the purest motives, forswear the aid of their dusky auxiliary, but the devil is not notably discouraged by their ingratitude. In fact, nothing is more surprising to the thoughtful than the way in which the devil continues to flourish in the face of universal reprobation, and there are not wanting philosophers to suggest that he is not only responsible for our immoralities, but for all our conventional moralities as well. Certainly they do him no dis-service.

It is not my purpose to write about the devil, otherwise than indirectly, but the difficulty of writing about questions of sex in the English language for English readers is that it is absolutely necessary to display a wholly indecent reticence. The only dissertation on sex that is really tolerated in England is the unrecorded badinage of our smoking-rooms, the modern equivalent of the folk-tales and folk-songs of our uncultured

ancestors ; and the mind shrinks from the task of translating a serious consideration of sex-questions into azure anecdotes and libidinous limericks. I had rather be indecently reticent than cutspoken on those terms.

Before we come to consider the circumstances that have brought about the latest phase of the revolt of a certain section of women against men, it is necessary to recall the nature of the truce that had been more or less observed by both sexes before the recent upheaval of militant femininity. The truce took the form of a compromise, and a very ingenious and successful compromise at that. Men were to be nominally, women wholly, monogamous. In exchange for the privilege of possessing one woman wholly, a man was expected to provide for her and their joint offspring. It was tacitly understood that men were intellectual, capable, courageous, and masterful, and that women were simple, faithful, and possessed of a thousand charms. Neither party to the compact was supposed to depart from these natural qualities. Men were not to be emo-

tional, and women were not to think. Looking back we can realize now that as far as they went they were golden days. Regarding the future we can feel no such blissful certainty.

Of course, the compromise failed in individual instances, but on the whole it worked very well, and it is not to these failures that we must trace the new feminist movement. It is due probably to two causes ; first, to the greater measure of education that is nowadays granted to women, and, second, to the economic fact that a large number of women can now earn their own living without loss of liberty or self-respect. The first is the vaguer, but probably the more cogent, reason ; for while our modern system of education has produced no noticeable change either for the better or the worse in our young men, it has certainly had a remarkable effect on our young women. They have taken, with the beginner's eagerness, to the engrossing pastime of thinking, and, in consequence, they show an increasing desire to break the great truce between the sexes.

And the second reason that I gave above

supplies them with the opportunity. There has always been a considerable number of women who did not desire marriage in itself, but who, nevertheless, were forced to marry in order to obtain a home and someone to support them. Nowadays these women can obtain a situation as clerk or typist and deride the efforts of clever, strong, masterful man to take the queenly citadel by storm. These newly-enfranchised women are rarely sufficiently sure of themselves to ignore man as they feel he ought to be ignored. They are rude to him in the mass in order to counteract a despicable, secret desire to appoint some individual manifestation of him their master. They throw away the one effective weapon of their sex of their own free will, but they are not prepared to face the resultant loss of all their battles with philosophic calm. They disdain the idea of charming men, but are dismayed when they find that men are not charmed. Behind the most ferocious Suffragette there still lurks woman, with one eye on the world and one on her mirror, and therefore she cannot see to fight.

It is for this reason that men have been able so far to treat the whole problem of the Suffragettes with tolerant good-humour ; but the man dwells in a fool's paradise (and not a bad place in which to dwell either !) who does not realize that behind this insignificant demand for votes lies hidden the germs of a struggle of a far more desperate character. It must be remembered that the standard of feminine education is steadily rising, and more women are becoming self-supporting every year. Now, the whole tendency of modern education is to arouse in the individual that curious form of discontent known as ambition, without providing him, or her, with any efficient means of satisfying it. In man this hopeful, helpless state of mind is almost normal, but for woman it has the fatal attraction of novelty. For countless generations she has been content with waging the placid warfare of home life, and its little victories and little defeats have composed the history of her days. But now, as it were in a dream, she sees the world that man has conquered opening to her feet, and, the dream being new, she does

not realize that the boundaries of that world are no wider than the boundaries of the kingdom that she has ruled hitherto ; and she longs to change the substance for the shadow. Revolting against the divine purpose of her motherhood, she covets the unreal splendour of the purposeless lives of men. Why should she, she asks, with her hands and her eyes and her brain, be no more than a mother and a nurse of babies ? She does not stay to consider that man's part in the universe is even smaller than this. She wishes to sacrifice the ennobling privileges of her sex for the glamour with which men hide the weary emptiness of their days. And circumstance is helping her to do it.

The revolt of woman against motherhood is no new thing ; but whereas in bygone years we have been accustomed to regard it as an eccentricity, I am not sure that in the future we may not find it a very serious factor in our national life. I believe that among the English middle classes the birth-rate is already abnormally low, and when, as seems likely to happen sooner or later,

the whole of our population joins the middle class, the effect of the new feminine ambitions will certainly be very serious.

I am aware that, so far from attacking motherhood, the actual Suffragettes of to-day find it one of the most useful weapons in their oratorical armour ; but the fact remains that they themselves, the pioneers of a movement that is to work wonders for their sex, have done very little to supply the incessant demand of the State for babies, and it is difficult not to conclude that the tendency is for the intelligent woman of the day to examine the problem and find that it is not worth her while to be a mother. The only drawback of this decision is that it renders her absolutely useless and even wasteful to the country that gives her shelter. She eats food and burns coal, but so far as human progress or the prosperity of the State is concerned she might just as well not be there at all. We human creatures may humbug ourselves as we will, but the first law of our existence is that we must continue the race. For women the breeding and raising of children have proved sufficient

to completely occupy the efficient section of their lives. The duties that men inherit are smaller, and they have found it necessary to invent politics, art, science, justice, education, and a thousand other toys to while away the idle hours and to help them to conceal their relative unimportance from the female sex. Hitherto we have most of us imagined that women could see through the hollow pretence of our lives, and it comes as a shock to discover that there are women, and clever women at that, capable of envying us our possession of gaudy, painted wings that glisten in the sunlight prettily enough, but will not help us to fly. Heaven knows we are some of us weary enough of this load of petty shams that the women of to-day seem to covet ! We have got to live out our days, and we may as well make the best of them, but surely it is permissible to remark that they do these things better in bee-hives.

I have ventured to call my article the "New Sex," and, looking ahead, it is not unreasonable to see women drifting into two strongly-divided camps. The one intellectual,

energetic, independent, and supremely useless ; the other emotional, affectionate, placid, and in all things motherly. The weakness of the former camp will be its sterility, though doubtless every generation will send its tithe of recruits. The strength of the latter camp will be its permanence. With the intellectual women men will fight, as they fight with each other, on terms of miserable equality. To the emotional women they will go, as they go now, to justify their existence and to meet their fate. The woman who wishes that she had been born a man is a fool.

XVIII

ON EDITORS

IN spite of their lack of faith, the present generation is but little tolerant of those who make it their business to reveal, and thereby to destroy, the heart of the great mysteries. Perhaps it is that, though we do not believe in anything in particular, we do not wish to accept the necessary responsibilities of our sceptical attitude towards things in general. Like the mythical but ubiquitous ostrich, we had rather veil our eyes with the sands of doubt, which is half-sister to faith, than acknowledge the wholly inimicable character of the shadows that haunt the desert in which we live. We do not believe, but we are unwilling to be told that we do not believe. And of our fear we create a virtue of broad-mindedness. Of all the concrete mysteries, none is more loyally and watchfully guarded

than the mystery of the editor. Dimly, like a dream seen from the heart of a dream, we are permitted to perceive that here is a Force, a Power, a Cause that induces multitudinous and widely-scattered effects. We conceive him as a being essentially super-human, a subtle judge of right and wrong, a dreamer of gigantic dreams, whose messages to us have the emphasis of an inspired command. To all ordinary men and women he remains invisible; it is enough to have met a sub-editor who has touched the great man's hand, an office-boy who has filled his ink-pot. Not that we would wish to see him if we had the power, for his infallibility would scourge us for a hundred mental weaknesses. Even his thoughts, we feel, are correctly punctuated.

It is not without a just sense of the value of mysteries that I hazard the assertion that editors are not really like this. It is not passing the bounds of a decent reticence to remark that by daylight they vary a little, but, nevertheless, in all essentials resemble the ordinary man. If I had to form an impressionist sketch from my vague recol-

lections of the type, I think I should draw a timid, hesitant man, very well informed on one or two subjects, but with the vast ignorance of the traditional judge on things in general. I should represent him as peeping gratefully at a catalogue of spring bulbs in the intervals of directing the affairs of the Empire. Honest, kindly, conscientiously anxious to reconcile the dim remnants of his youthful æstheticism with his duty towards his directors, his advertisement manager, and his family. Utterly out of touch with the literature of his day, but with a jealous admiration for Milton, Dr. Johnson, and Thackeray, and a very great contempt for the frivolous graces of modern prose. A man, as I have said, essentially timid, who would be reduced to dust in a day if he were not handsomely guarded by an army of cynical sub-editors and truculent office-boys. Some such shape my fancy portrait would assume.

But this is a fancy portrait—as far from the truth, perhaps, as the imagined editor of a literary-minded boy. I think the traditional editor is largely founded on these

happy dreams of scribbling youth. Sucking the midnight fountain-pen, and writing with that flattering ease indistinguishable, by night, from inspiration, it is natural that youthful writers should conceive that editors are on the side of the literary angels. "If my blank-verse tragedy is good," young Asphodel says to himself, "the editor of the *Chimes* will be glad to print it in his paper, and give me golden sovereigns to buy roses for Phyllis." The cynic, being the man who knows, would deal harshly with poor Asphodel's dream. He would point out that the least judicious assistant would not allow the tragedy to reach the editor, that even if it did the editor would not know whether it was good or bad, that even if, personally, he thought it was good he would not dare to print it, and, though this is beside the case, that Phyllis would prefer to receive jewellery or chocolates. Fortunately, the knowledge is hidden from Asphodel; he writes his tragedy for the waste-paper basket, and doubtless learns something in the writing of it.

A philosopher might deduce something of

the novelist's soul from the fact that, saving of the photographs of the modern "realistic" school, the average editor in fiction is not unlike the ideal person for whom young Asphodel twangs his ambitious lyre. Nothing can be more touching than the amount of attention these gentlemen give to the heroine when she takes to story-writing in order to keep her younger sister at Girton. Instead of rejecting her with printed slips of a clammy coldness, they give her encouragement, good advice, and crisp five-pound notes with a lavishness that real editors would do well to imitate. I notice that these fictional editors are always curiously susceptible to the charms of young women in distress, but, perhaps, it would be tactless to inquire whether this pleasant editorial *trait* has any foundation in fact. I have never met a heroine in real life who has sought assistance from editors by breathing on their grizzled heads, but it is possible that these things are done. I do know a boy of eleven who sent a short story to a well-known London daily paper and received in reply a three-page letter of kindly criticism in the

authentic handwriting of the editor. But if I had found this incident in a novel I would have thought it improbable.

I have said above that in all essentials modern editors resemble the ordinary man, and it is only going a step further to assert, with due deference to our common need of mysteries, that editors do not exist at all. There was a time when the personality of an editor dominated the paper he edited ; to-day the newspaper seems to eliminate the man. Very few people could name the editors of newspapers to which they are regular subscribers, and fewer still, perhaps, would notice any alteration in a newspaper if the editor were changed. It must be admitted that this state of things is rarely the fault of the editor. Nominally a tyrant, he is in truth the slave of many masters : his proprietors, the advertisers on whose favour the continuance of the paper depends, the conservatism that drives the oldest readers of a paper to passionate rebuke if the paper shows any signs of change, all these are forces to be reckoned with and obeyed. Then the English law of libel frequently

demands not merely a suppression of the truth, but a downright affirmation of falsehood. Against these powers the strongest personality can make but a feeble struggle. Newspapers ought really to die as soon as they have accumulated traditions to check their growth ; failing this, you can trace the passage of an editor down Fleet Street by the clanking of the fetters. Years ago, perhaps, he wrote lyrics more passionate than Swinburne's, more lucid than those of the Restoration singers ; to-day he can only consider the pretentious doggerel that passes for verse at General Elections. A power in the land, he dare not give his honest opinion on any mortal or immortal subject if that opinion is in any way opposed to the opinion of his readers. His very position deprives him of the right of free speech.

The decay of the Press began in England when journals first endeavoured to give their readers what they wanted rather than what they lacked. The editor automatically became the servant of the public, where before he had been the public's master. Pills and soap and publishers, board-school in-

tolerance and academic priggishness, fraudulent politics, and a fulsome obedience to the common sense that is common without being sense, these are the forces that dictate the policy of most of the successful modern newspapers. The average man is a fool, to be pardoned in this world and crowned in the next, because he does not realize his folly ; but by degrees he has been permitted to bring nearly all his periodical literature within the range of his empty mind. He expects his daily newspaper to support his own wavering opinions, and if one newspaper is recalcitrant he spends his copper on another. This man with a penny or twopence a day to spend in literature that shall start no disturbing echo in the vacant corridors of his mind is the virtual editor of half the papers in England. The power of the Press, of which we hear so much, is little more than the lackey's power to wheedle a coin or two from his master by dint of flattering obedience ; and the people have come to demand both the flattery and the obedience as a right.

The perfect editor would edit the perfect

newspaper because he would insist on making of it what he wished, and I think it would be a feature of his perfection that he would allow his contributors to write what they pleased. He would collect individualities as a boy collects postage-stamps, and having collected them he would appreciate their varied colour and design, and would not endeavour to mould them into a worthless, meaningless lump. He would not go out of his way either to please or displease possible advertisers. He would neither flatter nor abuse great men. And, lastly, I have written this article in vain if it is not apparent that I think this most important of all: the perfect editor would not care one proverbial damn about his readers.

XIX

THE REVOLT OF THE PHILISTINES

I do not know whether it has ever occurred to the reader, who possesses, no doubt, carefully cultured tastes in literature and art, to sympathize with the point of view of the man or woman who has not this supreme advantage. I use the word sympathize advisedly, for it is impossible to regard the individual who has failed to explore the finest country of the kingdom he inherits as anything but unfortunate. I would not call him wrong with the intellectual snobs, and still less would I call him right in the genial spirit of comradeship that seems to inspire a certain section of the democratic Press. I cannot help regarding him in much the same way as I regard a man born blind, who has never had the privilege of seeing flowers or the faces of pretty girls, and, not

having seen them, is quite incapable of realizing what he lacks. There is, however, a distinction between the two cases, for whereas our blind man cannot see at all, even the most ignorant people have rudimentary eyes for art ; and it may be admitted that they derive almost as much enjoyment from the crude pictures and books that they can understand as a person of culture derives from the last word in expression of some great artist. It may be said that the appeal of certain kinds of bad art to the uncultured is purely emotional ; but I have known sound critics of literature who were willing to confess that their judgment of a book was largely influenced by the effect it produced on their emotions, though, of course, their intellect had trained their emotions to require subtler food than that which brightens the eyes of maid-servants and sends factory-girls singing to their work.

For the human being who has learnt to appreciate good art, bad art becomes impossible and even painful. But bad art is more than sufficient to allay the æsthetic cravings of the large majority of people, and they

therefore not unnaturally regard fine pictures and books as being meaningless, pretentious, and frequently ludicrous ; and they further consider that the persons who profess to appreciate such pictures and books are humbugs of the most irritating character, who are secretly amusing themselves at their expense. It is necessary to understand this attitude of mind of the average Philistine, because to it is due that bitter spirit of intolerance directed against the beautiful as the æsthetically educated minority conceives it. The average mind is not soured because it cannot find any beauty in Keats or Shelley, it is angry that any one should pretend there is any beauty there to find ; and really this is a very natural attitude for the average mind to adopt. In asking a man to mistrust the evidence of his own senses as to what is or is not beautiful, you are asking him to admit that his individuality, which he clings as his only birthright, is a possession of no particular value after all. I repeat, then, that it is not unnatural that he should prefer to think that his own judgments are to be relied on, and that the

superior person who abuses the art he loves, and seeks to set up incomprehensible standards, is an æsthetic charlatan.

With these facts in view, the most ardent admirer of Robert Browning's "Red Cotton Nightcap Country" should hesitate to condemn the Philistine merely because he is intolerant and a little apt to snigger in his beard when the name of Browning is mentioned. Nor, though I have often heard it pleaded against him, can the aggressiveness be said to be wholly on the side of the armies of Askalon. We spend his money on pictures which he finds absurd ; we fill his streets with architecture which he considers hideously ugly ; and we call him a fool early and late because he will not buy and read books which he cannot understand, or support a national drama that he considers barren and unnecessary. What can he do in revenge ? Once upon a time he could deride our long hair and our sunflowers and condemn our laxity of morals, but to-day we dress as he does, and conceal our little weaknesses under a similar disguise. We have a dozen periodicals, a dozen societies

in which we can get up and abuse his ignorance to our heart's content. But there is not a newspaper in the country—no, not even now—in which an honest admirer of Mr. W. J. Eaton (author of the “Fireman’s Wedding” and many other broadsheet ballads) can say that Wordsworth was a babbler and Byron a nasty-minded aristocrat, and that people who profess to admire them are in urgent need of further education. You and I, dear reader, from the heights of our superiority, can score off the Philistine as often as we wish. How can the Philistine get his own back?

Taking everything into consideration, I am only astonished that the Philistine should be so tractable as he is. It must be remembered that he is in a sweeping majority in the land, and that this is an age very much inclined to meet the demands of majorities half way. Yet, with the possible exception of certain newspapers circulating entirely in Philistia, which, while they decline to share his attitude of mind, are willing to call him a very fine fellow for his halfpence, the position of the æsthetic aristocracy is stronger

than ever. There is no question here of yielding to the rights of the democracy ; rather it is coming more and more to be a canon of criticism that there must be something wrong with a work of art that has a wide popular appeal. Hitherto, it must be presumed that the general lack of interest in art of any kind has saved this tyranny from meeting the normal fate of all tyrannies, but there are not wanting signs that this popular indifference is coming to an end. Two or three generations of a knowledge of the arts of reading and writing, and the steadily rising level of the education that is provided for any one who wants it, is bound to make a difference sooner or later. And then. . . .

Will the Philistines rebel against the authority of the few ; will they claim the right to elect great artists for themselves, and to crown with immortal laurels those who have given them pleasure and satisfied their sense of the beautiful ? The mind shrinks at the thought of the reconstruction of museums and picture galleries that their revolt would bring about. Chromo-lithographs would

deck the walls of the National Gallery, and the Royal Academy would be devoted to the talents of the pavement artist unless he be, as I sometimes suspect, a product of decadent æstheticism. On the newspapers the new movement could hardly fail to react, and the working-man's epithet would incarnadine all their leading articles. It would be, perhaps, too wild a flight of fancy to imagine that even these events would induce the publishers to depart from the traditional conservatism of their trade, and doubtless, as now, they would continue in a dignified manner to publish books that no sane man could be expected to read. But in all other centres of artistic activity there would be chaos, and it is hard to say where the movement would stop.

It is impossible to dissociate the idea of revolution from that of bloodshed, and if the small group of critics and artists refused to revoke their former dogmatic judgments the revolt of the Philistines might prove to be serious indeed. As in a dream, not wholly deprived of splendour, I can see Bedford Park going up to heaven in a shape

of flame, and Chelsea riven to its artistic heart by the fire and hazard of war. I can see critics shot down in the street like dogs, and the bodies of poets swinging from the lamp-posts of Westminster. The air would be bitter with the smoke of burning books, and the feet of the mentally poor would spring buoyantly from the pavements, released from the intolerable load we have laid upon them since they were born. In broad daylight grown men would praise the Albert Memorial and call it lovely, and women would chant the ballads of Mr. G. R. Sims without shame for the ignorance of their sex. Wherever a man might go he would see men and women writing their autobiographies, free at last to express the miraculous spirit of their lives, without fear of the critics and their iron laws. Like paupers splitting firewood, so would they split infinitives with a light pen and a merry heart for the wonder of the things they had to tell their fellows. All men would be painters, critics, poets, architects ; in a word, all men would be artists. Here and there, perhaps, in a quiet corner one or two of us would

mourn our lost aristocracy, but all around us would surge the triumphant people, let loose in a world the like of which they had not known, joined in a universal brotherhood of bad art.

This, if you will, is a fantastic speculation, but there is, I think, an element of truth in it. To-day the majorities win, and it is not unlikely that sooner or later the majority will triumph over the critics in matters of art, and that the unfixed standards of beauty will be lowered to meet the tastes of the half-cultured and the half-educated. And the only melancholy satisfaction to be derived from the foreboding is that we can do nothing to prevent its being fulfilled. There is no stopping majorities when they are out for blood, and sooner or later they will realize the importance of art, and sweep us off the face of the earth. The only miracle is that the Philistines have endured the brow-beating of æsthetic critics so long.

XX

THE VIRTUES OF GETTING DRUNK

ONE of the disadvantages of writing in the language of a Puritan people is that before you argue about a problem at all you are expected to consider it from the standpoint of conventional morality. But, as a matter of fact, our moralities are dogmatic, which means that they are either above or below argument. Thus the many excellent persons who are of the opinion that drunkenness is in itself a sin, apart from its effect on the individual or the race, are obviously not prepared to argue about drunkenness at all, and I should be the last to condemn the comfortable convention that absolves a man from all intellectual effort and responsibility in judging between right and wrong. But there are, I imagine,

a great many people whose consciences will not allow their judgment to sleep with the placid generalizations of their forefathers, and for these the art of getting drunk must be examined in all its aspects before it can be condemned. Broadly speaking, even the unmoral have agreed to regard drunkenness as foolish, but the consuming of alcoholic beverages, which can only be regarded as the process by which a man becomes drunk, has many eloquent admirers and supporters. This, I know, is a favourite argument of those passionate fanatics so humorously labelled with the word temperance, who hold that a man who drinks a glass of beer is a glass of beer nearer intoxication and nothing more. The normal answer to these raucous moralists is that a man who eats a muffin is not really in any greater danger of perishing of a surfeit of muffins than he was before he consumed it. But in arguing, it is the divine right of the individual to crown what argument he pleases with his approval, and I confess that this method of regarding every one who eats a liqueur choco-

late as a potential drunkard appeals to my fancy and satisfies my reason.

Apart from the moral aspect, it is necessary to consider the effect of getting drunk on the mind and body of the individual, and also, in so far as it affects his welfare, the effect his getting drunk has on the community at large. Now, so far as the former part of the problem is concerned, I notice a curious thing. Like every one else who abuses his noble gift of sight by reading newspapers, I have read an extraordinary mass of condemnation of drunkenness from the pens of doctors, sociologists, clergymen, reformed drunkards, and other interested persons, but I do not recollect coming across one respectable argument against a man occasionally getting drunk. To get drunk is to consume alcohol to excess, and all the statistics and diatribes I have discovered have been directed against excess of this excess, rather than against the excess in itself. Of course I know that there is a widely accepted theory that drinking begets drinking, but, except in the case of persons with a natural tendency to

intemperance, I do not believe that this theory has any foundation in fact; while the yet wilder theory that drunkenness begets drunkenness, that a man who has once had too much to drink is thereby encouraged to drink to excess again, is, when we remember the extreme physical discomforts with which Nature rebukes excess, altogether beyond belief of any reasonable person.

As a matter of fact, the average consumer of alcoholic beverages never gets drunk, if only for fear of the bodily pains that state induces, and my mistrust of compromise in general would lead me to suspect that this timidity is a vice rather than a virtue; that he is likely reaping the varied ills that we are told are the necessary consequences of the consumption of alcohol, without enjoying the undoubted benefits that accrue from coming to grips now and again with the laws that control his life. Just as a child, who has sobbed its way back to penitence on its mother's lap, feels wiser and happier than it did before it committed its little fault, so the child man is apt to win a

greater love and a fuller knowledge of his mother Nature; often she has punished him with her frowns, and dried his tears with her sunshine. After all, we are no more than little children on a big scale: we are not afraid of dark rooms, but we are afraid of the darkness of the heavens; we do not run from our own shadows, but we stand panic-stricken within the shadows of our own hearts. And the analogy may be trusted further. In a nursery it is always the best child that gets into all the scrapes. It has inherited its due share of naughtiness, and it is not cunning enough to keep its transgressions within the vague limits of the law. And we may trace the way of the simple sinners through life readily enough. A drunken man walks down the street, and the hypocrites lean from the windows of their houses and rend the skies with their clamorous disgust. It is always pretty safe to trust a man who wears his vices on his sleeve.

But I fear that I have strayed a little from my argument. I hold no brief for

drunkenness, but I do think that it is a good thing that a man should occasionally, very occasionally if you wish, drink too much. In the first place, this does not leave him, like many of the less concrete vices, uncertain as to, or even ignorant of, his transgression ; and a realization of his own frailties keeps a man modest and companionable. The greatest fault of tee-totallers, so far as I have examined those dreary propagandists, is not that they are too consciously proud of their sobriety in face of a total absence of temptation, but that they affect to be wholly free from all those weaknesses that knit individuals, made in the image of God, into a human world. Yet it is difficult not to believe that drunkenness which reaps so violent and immediate a punishment is not a lesser vice than those defects of meanness and hypocrisy that a man may nurture unpunished in his heart. Self-respect is a quality so near akin to self-righteousness that in preserving the one we are always in danger of breeding the other.

A talisman by aid of which a man may

remain tolerant is cheaply purchased at the price of an occasional headache, but I am willing to go further and say that I believe that an occasional excess in his cups is good for a man's mind and body as well as for his heart. Any one who uses his mind in his work, though I fear that this is an argument that only appeals to the minority, will have suffered from time to time from an attack of staleness. If he be a member of Parliament he will find himself at a loss for a method by which to reform the House of Lords. If he be a writer of little articles he will find that all the little articles have already been written by some one else. If he be a poet the music of the universe will sound in his ears like the thin voice of a barrel-organ, heard from afar. At such a time, to betake oneself to the wine-bowl, in fitting company, is to win, after the lapse of a day, be it said, a new brain. It is as though some friendly hand had stirred up the stagnant mind with a stick, and brought the ideas to the surface like bubbles. And there is a parallel state of bodily stale-

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ness, for which the doctors prescribe a change of air, that can frequently be cured in the same simple fashion. It seems as though Nature likes obedience, but neither demands nor desires servility from her children. A day of hot coppers, suffered in a mood of patient humility, sends a man back to his work in the glad spirit of a dew-drunk butterfly.

I do not believe in making a habit of inebriation, any more than I believe in making a habit of doing anything, either good or bad. To be efficacious, a remedy of this kind must be used cautiously, and only when the occasion demands it. The man who is perpetually drunk is no better off than the man who is perpetually sober, and believers in Wilde's epigram should remember that excess ceases to be successful when it becomes normal. It is difficult, as Montaigne found in considering a rather similar problem, to lay down a definite rule of conduct in a matter of this kind, but I should think that man very unfortunate who found it necessary to get drunk more than twice in a year. It is possible

that, after a certain period in a man's life, when he has sinned too often to nourish any further belief in his infallibility, and when his mind is no longer capable of giving him surprises, it is not necessary for him to get drunk at all.

XXI

THE VERDICT OF POSTERITY

It is very common for critics and other individuals who take an interest in contemporary art to indulge in speculations as to how far certain manifestations of that art, which appeals to them, perhaps, in spite of their better judgment, possess the quality of durability. After Mr. Kipling's cloven-hoofed critic has examined a work, admitted its prettiness, and expressed a doubt as to whether it is art, there follows very closely the gentleman who says, "Oh yes, it seems to be art, but will it live?" And of the two he is the harder to argue with. In the first place, it is very difficult to say what constitutes life in terms of works of art, and it may reasonably be doubted whether any artist's effort at expression lives in the sense in which we use the word in discussing the

claims of a contemporary artist whom we do not like. What we can say is that some time after publication some books are read more than others and that many cease to be read at all; that it is not necessarily the works of art that preserve the widest audience that secure the greatest measure of general esteem, though this may sound paradoxical; and that many of our so-called English classics linger chiefly in the pages of literary histories, and are rarely read save by experts.

When we leave art and consider the attributes of human fame in general, we are bound to admit that for the majority of living human beings the dead have little interest or significance. We adopt, or rather, perhaps, adapt, their ideas; we take advantage of their discoveries; we take up the task of existence where they laid it down; but for the rest we say, like Tyltyl in the "Blue Bird," that there are no dead, though our motive is different. We accept the theory that a live dog is better than a dead lion with whole-hearted enthusiasm, and the idiot who gibbers in the cell of an asylum

is infinitely more alive to us than Shakespeare. Perhaps, subconsciously, we despise the dead because they have not been clever enough to go on living.

No, we will not allow the ghosts the smallest fraction of the life that boils in our veins and makes us commit crimes and heroic actions. Yet looking ahead to that inconceivable age when we, ourselves, shall be no more, we display a childish eagerness as to the ultimate fate of our individual personalities. Whether we are criminals or heroes, we wish the age to come to be aware of our identities, and it is possible to conclude from the lives of many of our great men that they would rather be remembered for their follies than forgotten altogether. Yet the man who sacrifices part of his life for posthumous fame should reflect that only a small percentage of men and women have any regard for the past, and that the remainder will avail themselves of whatever they may find useful in his life's work, without giving a thought to the dead man who was responsible for their inheritance.

Nevertheless, when we talk of a work of

art living, we mean that it still retains its individual appeal to a limited audience; and in attempting an estimate of what will survive of contemporary literature in a hundred years' time we must take into consideration the lines along which the cultured class is likely to develop. And here I may remark that in spite of the spread of scholastic education it does not seem likely to me that the cultured class of the future will be any greater in numbers than it is now. It is true that nowadays we teach every one how to read, but at the same time we take care to teach them that the habit of reading is unfortunate from the point of view of their material welfare. I should like to look forward to a golden age when every one should read good books, but I cannot even feel confident that a time will come when every one will talk about them. I foresee that the cultured class of the future, surrounded on all sides by individuals who are uncultured from choice and not from necessity, will tend to become more precious and more priggish than ever. The gap between journalism which caters for the many and literature

which can only appeal to the fit few will widen, and persons who really take an interest in English literature will be regarded rather in the light in which students of Anglo-Saxon are marvelled at now.

It should be possible to deduce what contemporary works this cultured minority will find worth the reading from the kind of literature that has worn down from the past to our own day, with some elements of life lingering between the battered boards. The difficulty here is to distinguish between the books that still command a genuine if strictly limited public, and those that really only survive as historical documents for the student of literature. The recent flood of cheap reprints gave us numerous editions of books of both classes, but how far these books were bought to read, and how far they were bought as a convenient substitute for valentines and Christmas cards, not even the publishers who sold them can say. This and the habit of giving books as presents and prizes render the circulation test unreliable when applied to the classics. How many people read

Spenser to-day? He is, it seems, one of the great immortals. But is he read by any one outside what we may call the professional class of book-reader—that is, poets, essayists, leader-writers in search of tags, and Mr. John Burns? Does any one read Ben Jonson? Does any one, to come nearer to our day—does any one here read Shelley? These are questions to which it is impossible to obtain a definite answer; but I can only say that if there is a large number of persons outside literary circles who read the English classics, they keep very quiet about their amiable hobby. I have sometimes thought, in moments of depression, that we who write get our living solely by taking in each other's scribblings. I am willing to allow that the state of mind of a man who can read the works of others without wishing to write himself is incomprehensible to me, and it is possible that he does not exist.

This doubt as to the nature of the circle that the classics still enchant renders argument by analogy a little difficult when we come to consider the work of contemporary writers from the point of view of posterity,

but one or two theories may safely be advanced. Work that depends for its merit rather on the novelty of its theme and the freshness of its arguments than on the perfection of its expression is bound to perish as soon as the public mind has assimilated the new ideas such work puts forth. This rules out at one stroke practically the whole of the work done by the more prominent writers of this very didactic age. I cannot see, to take a striking instance, what will induce posterity to read the plays of Mr. Bernard Shaw. But a section of our modern drama may survive as presenting a truthful picture of the life of to-day, while, as in the case of "Gulliver's Travels," the didactic significance is overlooked or forgotten. "Justice," to take a very up-to-date instance, may well render such a service to posterity as the "Shoemaker's Holiday" and "Bartholomew Fair" have rendered to us in restoring the atmosphere of a vanished age.

Again, I think it is important that the artist's style should possess that simplicity that appeals to all ages alike. It is possible for an intelligent person to read

Chaucer without a glossary to-day. Will it be possible for any one to read Mr. Rudyard Kipling with equal ease, in the year 2200? Chaucer, while sinning freely in his passion for gallicisms, relied for the most part on simple words and simple turns of speech. Mr. Kipling has such an affection for the ephemeral dialects of the hour that his early short stories already betray their age. There is a danger, too, in the direct appeal to sentiment, for the sentiment of one generation is the sentimentality of the more sophisticated generation that succeeds it. Mr. Barrie's little *Thrums* papers, that were so good when they first appeared, have hardly escaped the effects of this disastrous metamorphosis.

Where are we to find our present-day writers of distinction who are not didactic, who are not sentimental, and who write clear and expressive English? I have made a list of five, and I think that the reader must be happily catholic if he can make a longer list for himself. And if we leave the realms of literary art, it would, I think, be even harder to find a number of men likely to

achieve even that transitory fame that man grants grudgingly to the mighty dead. I can think of two painters, but I cannot think of one politician who will seem more than a shadow to those that come after. Perhaps, like the majority of our countrymen, the age to come will esteem professional cricket and football above art, and we may not make so bad a showing after all ! The thought is consoling to our national vanity, even if we do not go so far as to hope that the possibility may be fulfilled.

XXII

IS ENGLAND DECADENT?

WHILE, on the whole, finding party politics a little insincere, and inclined to sympathize with the oblivious state of mind that readily forgets General Elections, I think it would be rather a pity if the message of one election in particular was allowed to pass unregarded. This message, as our partisan newspapers acknowledged a little ruefully, was of a wholly negative character. The people of England did and did not believe in the House of Lords ; they liked and did not like the Budget ; they appreciated and did not appreciate Free Trade, or Tariff Reform, as it is sometimes called. In a word, speaking by means of a record poll, the people of England said nothing to which any reasonable man could attach any reasonable meaning. Our professional politicians shouted lustily

into the abyss, and waited in vain for the sound of an echo. It is only fair to add, since politicians are much maligned, that both parties detected the inspiring voice of victory in this embarrassing silence ; but in face of the irreconcilable natures of their respective claims, it seems juster to presume that both parties were defeated, and this, to the discriminating student of men and voters, seemed the most natural result of the recent election. It may be true of all elections—it was certainly true of this one—that the man in the street, indistinguishable in these democratic days from the god in the car, votes in accordance with the decrees of his own prejudices, rather than from any strong feeling on the general issues of the election. A candidate with a queer-sounding name loses votes, just as a candidate who is the son of a peer gains them. Owing to the varying degrees of intelligence possessed by voters, this system of voting produces chaos. Thus, in the election under notice, many men voted for the Government because the publicans had raised the price of whisky, while many men voted for the Opposition for the very

same reason ! It was unreasonable to expect a definite opinion of the Budget from a country thus distraught ; nor, indeed, did we get it.

I imagine that patriotism, using the word in any but its parish-pump significance, is the rarest of all human enthusiasms. It demands the possession on the part of the individual of two qualities—altruism and imagination, which are sufficiently rare by themselves, but quite exceptional in partnership. It is, I think, fairly obvious that it is in imagination that present-day Englishmen are lacking ; they have not the art—to use a homely phrase—of seeing beyond their noses, and they demand that all their sacrifices should be of immediate and obvious benefit to their neighbours. It is, perhaps, a hard saying, but I am sure that the mere idea of making sacrifices for their country strikes the average Englishman as savouring of cant. How far this may be due to our growing materialism I do not know. In the golden age of Elizabeth England seems to have bred fine imaginations with the greatest ease ; her sons were not merely

imaginative in word, but also in deed, as the stories of her ancient ports can testify. But nowadays there is something essentially un-English in concerning oneself with national abstractions to the detriment of one's own business. According to the labels which we have elected to attach to our individual prejudices, the word patriotism is unpleasantly suggestive either of Jews, Mafeking, and cheap Union Jacks, or of disloyal Celts and bomb-throwing niggers. The invention of local patriotism—that rascally phrase to salve the consciences of the unpatriotic—has proved but a step to the general adoption of self-patriotism. The modern Englishman is the deafest and blindest kind of individualist. Any idea that lies outside his own mental environment strikes him as fanciful and ridiculous. The country in which he lives is inhabited only by his friends and connections, and his sole duty is to guard their interests. Sometimes he has a snobbish esteem for the masters of richer countries than his, sometimes he indulges in sentimental pity for those who starve at his frontiers—masters of no country at all. But

normally he makes his house not merely his castle, but his kingdom, his empire, and his ultimate heaven as well. England as an ideal to be served and cherished no longer exists for him at all.

The decay of the patriotic ideal is serious enough in itself, but it becomes even more significant if we regard it merely as one particular manifestation of a general decay. The present-day Englishman is afraid of the big thought, the big emotion, the big love. The big thought is pretentious, the big emotion is bestial, the big love is affected ; so, with a shrinking phrase and a cackling laugh, he tries to veil his coward soul from anything too great to be comfortable to its infinite smallness. Generation on generation of unchecked prosperity has robbed him of humility, the virtue that is a bond of fellowship between the nobly little and the nobly great. He has come to believe that he has not only inherited the earth but created it, or, at all events, so far improved on its original design that all the credit is his by right ; and he feels that the criticism implied in the existence on his earth of greater

forces than himself is irreverent. Seated on the throne that he has raised, he is quite satisfied with the odour of the incense that he himself has lighted, and the winds that blow through the temple doors and disturb the calm ascent of the admiring smoke are very distasteful to him. Within his breast the anger of an outraged god and the sorrow of an interrupted worshipper strive for mastery, which means that he meets criticism with a lofty air of unconcern, not the less insolent that it is assumed. Time was when the English were the most arrogant people in the world because they lived in England; to-day England is the most arrogant country in the world because it is inhabited by the English. Then we were proud of our manly virtues; now we are proud of our freedom from the manly vices, without asking what that freedom signifies. It is our pleasure to set an example to the civilized world, yet as a nation we are not united even in sanctimoniousness. Every individual wishes to force the majority to accept his own standard of bigotry. We are, however, more or less agreed in condemning

the manner of life of the other European nations, and it is not our fault that they regard us as hypocritical yahoos, and hold Saint John Bull himself to be no more than an inflated frog, by no means emancipated from the ancestral slime.

Being a journalist, I may be inclined to attach too much importance to the Press as representing the public mind of the hour ; but so far as it is possible for one man to study a nation, I am convinced that England has the Press it deserves. In itself this is natural, for the whole policy of present-day newspaper proprietors is to turn out a paper that will please its readers rather than inform or influence them. In consequence, from the pert frivolity of *Punch* to the Teutonic and stodgy erudition of the *Athenæum*, the earnest student of periodical literature will find that a constant effort is being made to treat the abstract in terms of the concrete, to measure the infinite from a fixed and belittling point of view. Politics are party politics, religion is the clash of rival creeds, love is a compromise between the Divorce Court and the Agony column,

death is an obituary notice five letters long, literature is bad journalism, art is bad morality, and, it might be added, a newspaper is an advertisement sheet containing certain other matters. It is only necessary to compare this with the view, for instance, held by the man in the street on the subject of different nationalities to realize how exact a judgment the newspapers have formed of the popular mind. The French are immoral, the Germans eat sausages, the Italians play barrel-organs, the Japanese use fans, Spaniards visit bull fights, and Russians are anarchists. Thus with one pregnant fact the democratic critic is able to distinguish between foreigners, or aliens, as they are called, if they are unfortunate enough to have no money.

I doubt whether the English were ever broad-minded as a nation ; indeed, the Elizabethan comedies and the narratives of the early voyagers breathe as full a spirit of intolerance as the most ardent patriot could desire ; but this older intolerance was very definitely national—that is to say, it represented the prejudices of the nation rather

than those of individuals, and from one point of view this spirit was to be commended. But to-day we can only judge the temper of the nation by striking an average between the loud-mouthed condemnations of a thousand factions. The newspapers, which might help, are swayed hither and thither by the clamour of individuals. When the voice of the nation is asked for a judgment we hear the babble of a million tongues.

I remember reading somewhere as a sign of our national decadence that, whereas in our brave days we were proud of being so small an island, we now sought the favour of the gods by bragging of the immensity of our Empire, and perhaps the criticism contains a hint of the causes of our present weakness. That we are strangely weak no man who has considered our attitude towards Germany can deny. While cultivating our individual conceit, we have lost the happy faith in ourselves that helped our forefathers to do impossible things. We have no national religion, no national art, no national songs. We have not the power to act nobly, so we brand as fanatics the few who seek

to conquer themselves. We have not the power to think nobly, so we scoff at noble things. During the last appeal in question to the nation, the whole of the arguments of the politicians were directed to individuals, and it was as individuals that we replied.

England, it might be said, no longer exists ; we must draw what consolation we may from the fact that it has been conquered by Englishmen.

XXIII

UNCOMFORTABLE SPRING

SPRING is here again, and the observant will doubtless have noticed shy almond-blossoms gleaming in the front gardens of suburban villas above the tufts of crocuses. Now the many-mooded weeks begin to grant us tremulous blue days, tender and soft as the petal of a flower, one here and one there in magnificent promise of the azure summer that we shall not get. The flower-girls delight the streets with fragrant heralds from the Channel Islands ; tailors talk glibly of the new spring patterns that are exactly like the old ; women feel a strange longing to impale the dead bodies of new birds with their hat-pins in honour of the season ; the democracy cleans its bicycle and schemes improbable holidays ; and the hibernation

of county cricketers draws to its welcome close.

There is a general tendency on the part of writers, and possibly of most individuals, to describe spring as being a very joyous season for poor humanity. Doubtless it was joyous enough in primitive days, when we lived in caves and went to Nature direct for our *table d'hôte*; but in a state of civilization we are unwilling to be reminded of the primitive element in our natures. As far as possible we have abolished the seasons. The long nights that must have been singularly monotonous to our hairy ancestors are no more; indeed, for the privilege of living a few hours by artificial light we spend an appreciable fraction of the daylight in bed. We skate in summer and eat strawberries in winter. We have flowers all the year round, and we do not associate the breaking of the buds on the trees with warmth and over-eating. Even the traditional custom of making love in the spring is, I fancy—*pace* Tennyson—going out of fashion. Spring, the birth of the new green year, has lost its old significance of good times come again.

Children are often, oddly, more civilized than grown-up people, and it is they who show the greatest resentment of the perturbing effects of spring, so that at this season of the year the wise ruler of children does not fail to lay in a supply of tonics, those nauseating compounds that are supposed to reconcile young people with life. But though adult grievances against Nature's recurrent frivolity are not so easily cured, they are by no means less genuine. It may be that during the long winter months we have cut and polished our latest philosophy of life to a fine perfection, yet a careless spray of almond-blossom and a wind like good Burgundy will undo our work in a trice, and all is to be done again. It seems as though a man may by no means contrive to pass peaceably from his cradle to his grave borne on the placid wings of a fixed idea. The spring has a rough way with our philosophies, though a civilized man without a philosophy is a forlorn and disillusioned creature, painful to the eyes of the cultured elect. To the convenient dogmas of civilization the spring affixes an impudent note

of interrogation ; it wakes strange doubts of authority in our minds in the spirit of the schoolboy whose idle fingers elongate the nose of his schoolmaster, caricatured on his blotting paper. We begin to feel rebellious against the conventional virtues that have been as iron laws through the winter. We question work and obedience and sobriety. Our eyes, rigid moralists at other seasons, detect the shapely angles of women with a certain glee. We strut a little in our walks abroad, and clutch eagerly at feather-brained excuses for neglecting our business. Our quickened blood reproaches all our decent rules of life as so many spoilers of sport. We dream as far as our lack of practice in that exercise will permit us. The wind which blows across the mountains has made us mad.

And yet we are not happy at this time of year, and the reason is by no means difficult to discover. During the calmer months we are content to live the life that civilization demands of us, ignoring the mischievous suggestions of our emotions and even of our intellects. But when April

comes, and, encouraging us to doubt the wisdom of our voluntary fetters, deprives us of that solemn vanity which guards us normally from the consequences of our humanity, we are like rudderless ships cast haphazard on to the disordered sea of life. In December we can look at pretty girls with a proper reticence of eye and thought, for we know that the moralities of our neighbours are all about us; but in April or May we do not care a primrose for our neighbours or their moralities. Our eyes sparkle, our lips taste the breath of life, our feet tap tunes on the pavement, and in our hearts we say, "Good heavens! how pretty the girls are this year!"

This would be well enough in its way, if we were accustomed to dealing with such braggart and swashbuckler thoughts and knew how to keep them under a generous but firm control. But in the placid seasons of the year that civilization has made its own we do not think at all, since wise men have thought for us already, and we only permit ourselves such emotions as the experience of others has shown us to be safe.

Rebel spring will have none of our cautious conventions, and his foaming splendours act on our minds like strong ale on the guarded bodies of total abstainers. We are all poets in the spring, but, unlike those who dwell all the year round on the slopes of Olympus, we do not know where we are. We call our mother Nature "ma" with the unblushing confidence of commercial travellers, and are genuinely puzzled when she scratches our faces in a tempest of indignation. Even the narcissus, according to certain scientists, can give us influenza, or, at the least, hay-fever, and in our new-found enthusiasm for emotional adventure we shall be lucky if we escape so lightly. What will they say in Hampstead if we take to reading the *Yellow Book* because the daffodil has more courage than our sister the swallow?

I suppose it was my subconscious realization of the perils of spring that led me recently to fly to the friendly shelter of those Surrey pine-woods that won me as a child, and hold the better part of me captive still. The man who has never made friends with a pine-forest does not know what a forest

can be. My own especial woods have the moving dignity of a vast cathedral ; the cool dimness of untrodden aisles stretching between tapering columns, while here and there, as it were through stained glass, a brittle sunbeam falls to break into a thousand glittering fragments on the smooth roughness of the pine-needles. The birds are the best of choristers, while numberless insects droning in the heather of the clearings imitate closely enough the devout murmur of a distant congregation.

Moreover, to help my peace, there are no creatures of the female sex in these far solitudes, save for a few small pinafored atoms who gather fuel in silence, suffering the majesty of the pines to hush the shrill loquacity of their youth. In a world of feminine changeableness it is an agreeable quality in pine-woods to be very much the same at any season of the year. They assume no sordid poverty in winter, no arrogant hopefulness in spring. An oak-forest has a thousand moods to perplex the heart of man ; the pines have but one mood, and that a mood of noble and enviable serenity.

"I never get between the pines but I smell the Sussex air," sang Mr. Hilaire Belloc before Westminster took him wholly, and in the same way the pines speak eloquently to me of that fairest part of England where Surrey meets Hampshire. Black Lake, Waverley, Sandy Lane, Lower Bourne—the very names are like songs to me. There is an inn that some of my readers may know that has a name like a poem and draught-beer like an anthology, and the "Pride of the Valley," with its proprietary fish-pools and its maternal solicitude for the welfare of the "Devil's Jumps," is all that the most ambitious valley could desire.

But all this is, perhaps, a little remote from the spring, save that I hold that that man is wise who realizes the dangers of this ring-time season and betakes himself to some quiet place where he can contemplate the face of Nature melting into her new laughers without fear of being compromised by that element of primitive man that still survives within him, and is apt to give such violent manifestations of its existence when the buds are breaking on the trees. This

is the season when stockbrokers marry their typewriting girls and the younger sons of hereditary legislators go every night to the Gaiety Theatre, with a Saturday matinée thrown in. This is the season, or so the novels tell me, when grey-haired editors pinch the cheeks of their beautiful poetesses, and when the poor young man, who has loved us faithfully all the winter, proves to be the Duke of Southminster, the richest and most interesting of all the backwood peers. To the foolish, romantic incident of this character may seem harmless or even desirable ; but to the majority that has realized the soundness of the lines on which civilization has decreed that the world should run, spring, with its eccentricities, must remain an inconvenient and distressing season.

XXIV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF GAMBLING

THERE is a season of the year when even the most steady-going of men and women are incited by the winds of spring to take an interest in the affairs of the Turf, even to the extent of hazarding pieces of gold on the behaviour of horses of which they have not previously heard. This being so, it is hardly astonishing that a poet should, for once in a way, write a sporting article, though I have no intention of discussing the chances of the horses entered for the Derby, beyond remarking that Tressady is a prettier name than Lemberg or Neil Gow. It is the sportsmen rather than the horses that interest me, and when a race is over I always look round to see how losers are taking their losses. When an Englishman meets with

disaster he does not swear or weep or de-
pose his fetishes. He adapts his face to a
mark of unconcern, and fixes his eyes on
eternity, lest any human being should detect
the un-English upheaval within. England,
of all nations, is the nation of gamblers, but
it knows how to lose almost better than it
knows how to win.

Yet in this passion for taking risks, and even more perhaps in this stoicism in face of defeat, it is easy to trace one of the principal causes of our extraordinary success as a nation. It must have occurred to every one who has studied the voyages of the English seamen in the pages of Hakluyt and Purchas that few of these expeditions could be described as sound commercial transactions ; and, ignoring this trait of the English character, one would be compelled to wonder, not that Englishmen should be prepared to risk their lives on such enchanting ventures, but that staid London merchants should be willing to finance them. Sometimes these little ships brought back diaries of strange adventure written in naïve and charming English ; sometimes they did not

come back at all ; but rarely, I fancy, can they have brought much treasure in gold and spices to the imaginative capitalists who equipped them. Yet the game went on, and while the adventurous vessels cruised happily in unknown seas, the merchants who owned them dreamed over their musty ledgers. They would have diamonds and rubies enough when their ships came home. There is something significant in the pleasant English phrase.

I suppose it seems a far cry from the sea-washed Indies to pastoral Epsom Downs, from the gentlemen adventurers of Elizabeth to those other gentlemen who will lose their money with a calm brow on Derby Day. And yet I think it is only another instance of the way in which civilization preserves our primitive passions while changing our manner of expressing these passions. I am not sure there is any deterioration ; it is only our lack of imagination that makes the present seem so sordid. We know that those little ships were badly provisioned and utterly dirty. We know that their crews frequently mutinied,

and that the officers quarrelled among themselves and cheated their employers. They would murder natives on the smallest provocation ; probably they did not wash. Against these things you may set an almost animal courage and a not unimaginative patriotism that permitted them to steal and murder with a good heart. A modern racecourse crowd, considered in bulk, will be found to share these attributes. It is dirty, ill-provisioned, quarrelsome, and dishonest. But, as last Derby Day proved, it is the most loyal crowd in the world, and it would be idle to deny it the courage of the gambler. The race-course mob has another quality that it would be unjust to ignore ; it is insanely generous.

I have an ancestor, so runs the dearest of my family traditions, who was hanged as a pirate by the Spaniards at Port Royal. How much of that priceless piratical blood the centuries may have transmitted to me I do not know, but if I were his very reincarnation I could hardly hoist the Jolly Roger in an age that may believe in fairies, but certainly does not believe in pirates. A

modern Captain Flint would be driven off the high seas by the journalists. They would count his pistols, and measure his black flag, and publish interviews with his school-fellows. It would be impossible for him to maintain the correct atmosphere of mysterious cruelty when *Tiny Tots* had given its little readers a photograph of his pet rabbit. Besides, he could make a better living on the "halls." This being so, I must needs find another outlet for my fraction of my ancestor's adventurous spirit, and I find it, not unworthily I hope, in the occasional backing of outsiders.

There is much to be said for this kind of adventure. In the first place, it enables you to back your fancy on the only sound system of betting on horses with agreeable names. Others may burden their minds with tedious histories of pedigrees and previous runnings ; you are at liberty to let your eyes roam over the card in search of pleasant gatherings of vowels and consonants. Sometimes mischance will lead you to select a horse, the cramped price of which suggests that it may possibly win, but there is no

need to be disheartened. You have only to choose again. Nor, in the long run, is there any risk of success turning these idyllic speculations into commercial transactions. Now and again, perhaps, the heavens will fall, and your ship will come home laden with gold and silk and ruddy wine. But on the whole your ledgers, if you keep them, will tell a long tale of wrecks and drowned men and uncanny swift disasters, amply compensated for, however, by the thrills that are the true rewards of the adventurous. Bookmakers, too, are very pleasant to you if you bet on this principle. When I made my investment on the last Derby at a delightful price the bookmaker turned to me with a charming smile. "I hope I shall have the pleasure of paying you!" he said. I fear backers of favourites rarely receive such courtesy.

It is a fact that if you are not a Carnegie or a Rockefeller an occasional bet provides an admirable foundation for the building of dream-palaces. "When I back a winner" is a phrase that leads up pleasantly to the spending of a deal of fairy gold, and the

best of this kind of shopping is that if you are expert at it the possession of the real gold that is so hard to win becomes in a sense unnecessary. If you purchase a thing a hundred times in dreams and then find that you still really desire it your imagination wants looking to. But I really do not know how the Nonconformists can call betting sordid. I hold no brief for the facial beauty of bookmakers, nor do I find grand stands the last word in architecture ; but when a man makes a bet he is simply seeking for something that he thinks necessary to complete his life. It may be beer, or it may be diamonds to deck an actress's leg, but in either case it represents an ideal, a human aspiration, and as such is not to be despised. If betting, which after all is the simplest, if the least reliable, way of trying to make money, is sordid, then must all ways of making money be sordid. But, as a matter of fact, few people bet as a means of procuring necessaries. Whenever I see any one putting money on a horse I see a man, gambling it may be, but, nevertheless, striving ever for beauty as he conceives it. When

I see a man earning his living I see a truculent stomach.

And now, as this is a real sporting article, I will end with a story of the Turf. At one of the smaller meetings there was entered in a selling-plate a horse called Pegasus, of which even the most cunning tout knew nothing whatever. As the handicappers were equally ignorant, they gave it the welter weight of ten stone, and hoped for the best. When the market opened on the race the horse travelled badly ; in fact, nobody would put a penny on Pegasus, and fifties were vainly proffered after the experts had examined the sorry screw, and the extraordinary person who, calling himself the owner, proposed to ride it. The *dénouement* you will probably have foreseen. When the tapes flew up Pegasus unfolded a gorgeous pair of amethystine wings and fluttered coolly down the course to win by a distance. You can imagine the gaping crowd, the horror of the s.p. offices, the joy of the poet and his friends. But the sequel is strange. At the subsequent auction a Jew bought Pegasus for fifty thousand guineas after brisk com-

petition. The race fund prospered and the owner of the second, but Pegasus never flew another yard.

And the Jew is a sad man, because the poet will not tell him what dope he used.

XXV

THE POET WHO WAS

THERE are some illusions which no man who has formed a high conception of life will readily allow to die. We cling to them because we realize that there is a wisdom that lies beyond the truth as we can see it—a wisdom that holds itself aloof from our timid doubts and reasonings. Of these immortal illusions there is one that is of special value to the artist; he must believe, however often circumstances appear to give him the lie, that great work can only be done by great men. The first work of every creative artist is to create his own character, and if he fails here through weakness or carelessness, that failure will be expressed and emphasized in his artistic work. So if admiring grapes we find ourselves confronted with the bramble that has produced them,

we must form one of two conclusions—either the grapes are not true grapes, but Dead Sea fruit, bloom without and ashes within, or we lack the sympathetic insight that would enable us to detect the authentic vine in the heart of a briar.

Years ago there appeared a volume of poems for which I have ever had a great admiration, and, holding this illusion beyond all others, I always wished to meet the man who wrote them. He was, I knew, engaged in work that could hardly be grateful to a poet, and he was not to be encountered in ordinary literary circles ; still, whenever I read his book I felt sure that sooner or later I should meet this man and like him. His poetry appealed to my more individual emotions, expressing moods with which I was personally familiar. Meanwhile, till I might know him better, I contented myself with writing in praise of his poems whenever I had the opportunity.

Then one day I found a distinguished man of letters and the most enthusiastic of English editors sitting together in a Regent Street café. We fell to talking of the man and his

poems. We all admired his work, and, therefore, we all wished to meet him. "It's easy enough," cried the man of letters, "and after all we know the man through his book. We'll write him a mutual invitation to-night, and take him out to lunch to-morrow." There was something gallant in the idea, for we risked being snubbed, which is the last adventure an Englishman cares to have. We wrote the letter and sent it off.

The next morning was one of those rare and splendid days of which only England seems to have the secret—days when the wind is sweet and cool like a russet apple, and the warm sunshine follows close at its heels before one has time to be chilled. It seemed a good day on which to make a new friend. We called for our poet, and received a message that he would be pleased to come with us in an hour's time; so we went into Regent's Park and watched the squirrels playing with the nursemaids, and thrusting their inquisitive noses into the flowing hair of little girls. We felt that it was a generous world that gave us sunshine

and little squirrels and men who wrote fine songs.

It is perhaps foolish to expect men of talent to be either very handsome or very ugly, but I confess that I was disappointed with my first impression of the poet. He looked elderly and insignificant and suggested in some subtle way an undertaker's mute, the kind of man who wears black kid-gloves too long in the fingers, and generally has a cold in the head. I thought, however, that his eyes might be rather fine in repose, but the whole body and speech of the man were twittering with nervousness, and he affected me like an actor in a cinematograph picture. All Nature is the friend of the shy man, and behind this superficial unease we divined qualities of enthusiasm and amiability that would no doubt be patent when this overwhelming timidity had passed away.

Looking back, it seems to me that we all worked rather hard to set the man at his ease and find him worthy of his own work. We told him stories, we found mutual friends, we encouraged him to talk, we sympathized with him over his luckless environment, and

when called upon we praised and quoted his poetry without stint ; but still he fluttered like a bird caught in a snare. He took his food without enjoyment⁴, the sunny wine of France did not warm him a degree. We piped to him his own tunes, all the tunes of the world, and yet he would not dance. It was not that he was embarrassed by our compliments ; he took them for his due, as a poet should. But he seemed to think that our enthusiasm must have a sinister motive, that it was impossible that any one should have discrimination enough to wish to meet the author of his book for the book's sake. Nevertheless, being optimists in matters of art, our faith in the man held true ; if only we could persuade him to drop the mask of his nervousness we thought—

At the end of lunch we succeeded, and then I think we were all sorry. He stood there leaning gently against the table, while soured vanity spoke with a stammering tongue. It seemed that our little⁵ luncheon-party was a conspiracy to persuade him to publish some of his poems in the editor's paper, and therefore he found it necessary

to be rude. Had his suspicions been true, a more modest man might have thought such a plot pardonable, or even rather flattering. But the terms in which our poet expressed himself placed him beyond argument or sympathy. We shook hands and said good-bye, and he went away out of our world of sunshine and tame squirrels for ever and ever.

So far as my companions were concerned the matter ended there. Their kingdoms were secure, and they could afford to laugh at our honourable discomfiture. But my kingdom was yet to win, and I could not spare the smallest of my illusions. If such a man as I had met that day could do the big things, Art became of a sudden an unworthy mistress to serve. I went home and nervously took his book from the shelf, wondering how far my new knowledge of the man's personality would spoil my enjoyment of his work. I need not have been anxious ; they were real grapes, though perhaps I acknowledged for the first time that their distinctive bitter flavour prevented them from being of the first quality. Still, they

were admirable of their kind, and I had to satisfy myself how such fruit could have grown on such a vine. .

And then with a flash of intuition I saw the truth. The flesh, the features, the mortal part of the man might survive, but I knew as surely as if I had been present at his death-bed that the youth who had written those poems was dead. Needless to wonder what thwarting of emotion, what starvation of appetite, had produced that burst of song ; the important thing to me was to realize that the man himself, as we reckon men in the hopeful world, had perished in the singing. With this knowledge to aid me, I could sympathize with the rudeness of the man we had sought to honour. For in his heart he knew himself little better than a changeling, and with the giant's robe of his splendid hour of youth hanging loosely about his shrunken bones, he must have found our enthusiasm no more than mockery.

I have not yet been fortunate enough to meet the author of that book of poems which I have admired so long, yet I feel sure that sooner or later I shall meet the man and

like him. I know that he will be young, and I think that on his lips his songs will have lost their bitterness ; for it is a hard thing if we must carry our concern for the roses and our sorrow for the spring-tide lightness of girls beyond the gateway of the grave.

XXVI

THE GIFT OF APPRECIATION

IT is hardly necessary to remind readers that Carlyle, the Scotchman who wrote a fine romance about the French Revolution but generally preferred to write in broken German, once devoted a book to the consideration of Heroes and Hero-Worshippers. These words are set on paper a long way from that and most other books, and I cannot recall for the moment the exact attitude he adopted towards hero-worshippers—whether he pitied them, patronized them, or admired them. As he was himself undoubtedly a hero one would expect his emotions to vary between compassion and admiration—the strong man's compassion for the weakness and admiration of the strength of the weak. I am sure at all events that he did not fall into the vulgar error of despising

hero-worshippers because they are content not to be heroes. Yet as I write it seems to me that the very name "hero-worshipper" has been spoilt by sneering lips ; we are asked to believe that they are only weak-minded enthusiasts with a turn for undiscriminating praise, and that they swallow their heroes, as a snake swallows a rabbit, bones and all.

Personally I think this is a bad way in which to eat rabbits, but the best possible way in which to take a great man. I detest the cheese-paring enthusiasm that accepts the Olympian head and rejects the feet of human clay. Until Frank Harris taught me better I thought Shakespeare's Sonnets were capable of but one probable interpretation ; but I did not wag my head with the moralist Browning and cry, "The less Shakespeare he !" To-day I do not find Shakespeare less great because he loved Mary Fitton ; it seems impossible that any one should. Yet Moore burnt Byron's autobiography, Ruskin would not write a Life of Turner because of the nature of his relationship with women, Stevenson abandoned an essay on Hazlitt

because of the "Liber Amoris"—Stevenson, whose essay on Robert Burns "swells to heaven"! In the face of such spectacles as these it is surely legitimate to pine for the blind generosity of the enthusiast, that incautious fullness of appreciation that lifts great men with their due complement of vices and follies on to a higher plane where the ordinary conventions of human conduct no longer apply.

Great men are usually credited with an enormous confidence in their own ability, but often enough they have been distinguished for their modesty, and the arrogance has only come late in life to support their failing powers of creation. In fact, it may be said that no man, even the most conceited, is assured of his own heroic qualities till some one tells him of them, and thus far it would seem that the hero-worshipper creates the hero. One enthusiast can create many heroes, which possibly accounts for the fact that we find in life that heroes are far more numerous than hero-worshippers. Nearly every one possesses the heroic qualities *in posse*; the gift of appreciation is propor-

tionately rare. Every day there are more great men and fewer admirers of greatness in man. In the next generation super-men will be so common that it will become a distinction to belong to Christ's democracy.

The standard example of hero-worship is Boswell's "Life of Johnson," a book whose greatness is universally admitted, and, it may be added, universally misconstrued. If we are to class biographies by their utility, it loses its pre-eminence, for we would have derived a considerable if insufficient knowledge of Johnson from the pages of Piozzi, Hawkins, and others ; whereas if that matchless prig Austen Leigh had not written the Life of his aunt Jane Austen, we should have known practically nothing of the inspired miniature painter, less certainly than we know of Shakespeare. But, of course, the greatness of Boswell's Johnson rests with Boswell, and not with Johnson at all. Johnson had all the traditional virtues and vices of the mythical average Englishman. He was brave, honest, obstinate, intolerant, and ill-mannered ; he was all these things with a violence to shake society, as his vast body

shook the floors of houses. It is this violence that marks him out as an exceptional man, for violence of any kind is abnormal, but it is safe to say that for one Boswell there will be born a hundred Johnsons. In terms of literature Johnson is only of interest as being the protagonist of Boswell's masterpiece. If his "Lives of the Poets" still exist to irritate the unwary, "Irene" and "Rasselias" are dead and buried. For all his greatness Johnson had not the wit to win for himself his measure of immortality. It needs the magic of Boswell's pen to put life into his dead bones. He displays his hand in many parts—as a learned pig, as a sulky child, as Falstaff, and, happily enough, often as a simple, kind-hearted man; but, whatever the rôle, Boswell never forgets to impress us with the fact that this is a man to be admired. He shows us Johnson bellowing at the thought of death; he tells us that he was a brave man, and we believe him.

Johnson apart, Boswell's Life is a masterpiece of self-revelation; he is so honest as an artist that he makes no effort to hide the petty dishonesties of his own nature. He

tells us how he won the tolerance of Johnson and, indeed, made himself necessary to him by means of skilful flattery. This signifies but little, for Shakespeare did not scruple to flatter Elizabeth and Pembroke, the greater folk of the moment. We are most of us willing to flatter great men if it gives them pleasure, but, unlike Boswell, we do not subsequently explain the process at full length in a book. It reminds us of Pepys taking careful note of his peccadilloes, but Pepys did not always remember that he intended posterity to read his diary. Boswell wrote without thought of concealment, handed his portrait of Johnson and his no less conscious portrait of himself to his own generation, and ever since has been regarded as a kind of thick-headed parasite for his pains. Boswell was not an intellectual man in the sense that Johnson was intellectual, but he had a wonderful knowledge of human motives and an appreciation of Johnson that brought out the latent genius in him, and ended by making the expression of his admiration more admirable than the man admired. Johnson is as dead as Garrick.

Boswell lives with the great ones of English literature. The hero-worshipper has outlived the hero.

As a rule it is to be feared that appreciation is a gift granted only to the young. In our green, unknowing days we used to divide books into masterpieces and miserable rubbish. The classification is convenient, but as our minds wear out and we become wise, the tendency is to find no more masterpieces.

Those were great nights when we used to read each other's verses and congratulate the world on its possession of our united genius. That is really the poet's hour, his rich reward for years of unprofitable labour, when the poets of his own unripe age receive his work with enthusiasm—an enthusiasm which in all honesty and all modesty he shares himself. Unhappily he is paid in advance; sooner or later he wakes to find that he is worshipping before the shrine of his own genius, and the shrine is empty. That is why I am half pleased and half melancholy when young men tell me that Antony Starbright, aged twenty, is the greatest poet since Keats. If they only knew

that I too in my hour was one of a group of greatest poets who all wrote poems to Pan and Hylas, when on summer nights that sometimes stretched far into summer mornings we were all hero-worshippers together and we ourselves were the heroes.

There is a box at the Strand end of Waterloo Bridge which is always brimful of the works of new poets, and I can never pass it without pausing to look at the little neatly-bound volumes which say so little and mean so much. All the enthusiasms, all the illusions of youth are there, printed with broad margins and bound in imitation vellum. I turn the pages that brutal critics have not troubled to cut, and bitterly lament the blindness that makes it impossible for me to know what the young men who wrote them really wanted to say. But it pleases me to think that each of those little books has its appreciative public, some half-dozen young men who know the author and can read the greatness and pride of his youth between the reticent lines of his work.

XXVII

POETS AND CRITICS

WHEN a short time ago I came across a book by the Poet Laureate, entitled "The Bridling of Pegasus," I confess that the title alarmed me. I do not want the present century to capture the winged horse. I should be sorry to see poor Pegasus munching gilded oats at a banquet of the Poetry Society, nor do I wish to find his photograph among the grinning actresses in the illustrated papers. But an examination of Mr. Austin's book soon reassured me. He has not bridled Pegasus. He has not even succeeded in harnessing Rosinante, but by a natural error he has hung his bridle on to a spotted wooden steed of great age, that served perhaps to amuse some of our less considerable poets in their infancy. Mr. Austin's criticism is as individual as his

poetry, and far more stimulating. I do not think that any poet could read "The Bridling of Pegasus" without being roused to passionate anger. It is as though a village schoolmaster had paid a week-end visit to the foot of Parnassus, and had embodied his miscomprehensions of what he had seen in the form of a series of lectures to his apple-cheeked pupils. Here you have the condescension, the assertive ignorance, the occasional smirking humour. Let the little boys write on their slates Mr. Austin's assertion that Byron is the greatest English poet since Milton, and let them add that Mr. Austin is the most irritating critic since Remus. One of these statements is true.

It is too late in the day to review "The Bridling of Pegasus," but it suggests the fitness of some inquiry into the relationship between poets and critics. It is of course as natural for critics to dislike the work of young and adventurous poets as it is for poets to dislike the writings of aged and sophisticated critics, for critics—of all men who work in words—love to support themselves on those mysterious crutches known

as canons of art, which any new poet worthy of the name promptly sends flying with a spirit of his winged foot. This is not to say that canons of art (the artillery of the small bore?) may not have a certain value—for critics; but poets, when they fall to criticizing their comrades, are usually content to rely on their individual judgments rather than to appeal to any universal theory of greatness in poetry, and, considered dispassionately, it would be easy to support the view that critics select their canons of art to justify the preferences that they formed when their minds were still receptive and unhardened by the inhuman task of criticism. To take a handful of poets at random, it seems impossible to lay down any one theory of poetry that will support the undeniable greatness of Herrick, Burns, Blake, Keats, Browning, Swinburne, and Meredith, and it may be noted that the Laureate—who writes as a critic and not as a poet—while treating of poetry from the academic standpoint, does not dare this ultimate adventure. He is content to arrange poetry in classes, and assure us that reflective

poetry is greater than lyrical, and that epic poetry is the greatest of all.

Even if we are to accept these dogmatic assertions, I can imagine no sane reader of poetry regulating his preferences by doctrine of this kind. To Mr. Austin the comparative popularity of lyrical poetry is a matter for keen regret. To me—so far does personal prejudice count in these matters—it is a healthy sign, since it suggests that those who read poetry to-day do so for pleasure rather than from a sense of duty. But if for no other reason, I would mistrust Mr. Austin's canons on account of the extraordinary conclusions to which they lead him. Probably most foreigners would agree with Mr. Austin that Byron is the greatest English poet since Milton ; but poetry is the one possession that a nation cannot share with its fellows, and the countrymen of Keats and Shelley, of Browning and Swinburne, must perforce keep the enjoyment of their rarer inheritance to themselves.

Nor do his canons help Mr. Austin to fare better on smaller points. Thus when he wrote that "no poet of much account is ever

obscure" he had clearly forgotten Browning, Blake, and the Shakespeare of the Sonnets.

The Sonnets are occasionally obscure because in them Shakespeare is expressing very intricate and subtle emotions, quite beyond the range of ordinary lovers. Browning is obscure because his mind was an overcrowded museum in which his thoughts could not turn round without knocking freakish ornaments and exotic images off the shelves. • Blake was obscure, as Wordsworth was often inane, through trusting too much to inspiration. Great poetry is not obscure ; but the ranks of the great poets supply exceptions to all generalizations.

Again, Mr. Austin finds it strange that two such great poets as Dante and Milton should suffer from a total lack of humour. This opens up a fruitful field of speculation, but probably this deficiency is the rule rather than the exception. Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Blake, Tennyson, and Swinburne all lacked it, though some of these poets tried to be funny at times. Browning had a sense of humour, but it may be doubted whether it did his poetry any good.

Shakespeare had enough humour for fifty men of letters ; but he had everything. Mr. Alfred Austin has not a sense of humour, though he sometimes indulges a cumbrous spirit of gaiety that recalls Mr. Pecksniff in his moments of relaxation.

No, I do not believe in canons of art, save, if you will, of a vague and ineffective character that leave artists free to do what they like. Nevertheless, the school of criticism to which Mr. Austin belongs being powerful these days, I think it would be a goodly task to prepare a list of aphorisms to hang by the bedside of critics of poetry. Mine would be something like this :—

1. A good critic is a man who likes good work, and by dint of his enthusiasm is empowered to perform miracles, teaching the blind to see and the deaf to hear.

2. There are two kinds of poetry, good and bad. Minor poetry is a phrase used by incompetent critics who dare not oppose their judgment to the possible contradiction of posterity.

3. “To artists who can treat them greatly all times and all truths are equal. . . . A

poet of the first order raises all subjects to the first rank" (Swinburne).

4. If the poet's intellect gives power and direction to his work, his emotions supply the force that creates it. With most men the emotions become exhausted or sophisticated at a comparatively early age. Hence most poets have done their best work when they were young.

5. The aphorism that poets are born and not made is merely an untruthful expression of the fact that not every one can become a poet by taking pains. It would hardly be excessive to say that the first task of every artist is to create his own genius ; it is our misfortune that most artists have neglected to do this.

6. Poets who try to teach in song have derived small benefit from their suffering.

7. We have all endured the man who sings because he must ; there is something to be said for the man who sings because he can.

8. The wise critic will always approach poetry on his knees, even though he ends by sitting on it.

9. Bad poetry is not nearly so harmful as bad criticism of poetry.

And so on. . . . It would be possible to fill a number of pages with such things, without saving one critic from the quenchless flames. The only sane method by which to become a good critic of poetry is to love poetry. That is why Professor Saintsbury's "History of English Prosody" seems to me to be a great book. I think he has the most catholic appreciation of poetry that any man, not excluding the poets themselves, can ever have achieved, and he is free from the poet's inevitable prejudices. The first volume may be skimmed over advantageously by any one not specially interested in prosody as a science; but the second and third volumes should be read and re-read by all lovers of English poetry. Such a critic may well reconcile poets to criticism.

And this brings me to the vexed question of the utility of critics. It seems to me clear that critics can be of little service to men of genius or even to artists of real ability, but as middlemen between artists and the general public they are, unhappily, neces-

sary. It is often forgotten how far the reading public to-day is dependent on the critics to tell it how many of the monstrous multitude of new books are worth reading. Poetry is very badly treated by the Press in general because there is no money in it, and the daily newspapers prefer to devote their literary columns to reviews of novels written in batches of six by elderly unmarried ladies between breakfast and lunch. But it must be added that the bulk of the criticism of new poetry that does appear in the periodical Press is surprisingly well done. The only pity is that there is not more of it.

XXVIII

MONTJOIE

MONTJOIE lies in a deep valley of the mountainous district known as the Eifel. The little town is built on a bend of the river Roer, which is really one long waterfall from one end to the other, and is always turning in its bed as if it were looking for a hairpin. Like all mountain streams, it becomes a raging torrent in winter-time after a thaw, which perhaps accounts for my impression that half the houses in the town are falling into it and that the other half are climbing out with glistening walls and waterweed in the crannies of their roofs. Wherever the townsfolk go in the valley they hear the breathless song of their river ; it rings in the ears of new-born babes, it calls after the dying through the closing gates. On Sunday nights, when the young men

have come home from the factories at Aix to meet their girls, who work in the silk-factories at Montjoie, the river absorbs the sound of their mirth, and, since it is a merry river, its voice is unchanged.

These silk-factories are the ‘last word’ in a commonplace industrial story. At one time Montjoie was famous—“throughout Europe,” says the guide-book—for the manufacture of cloth, and the town displays many fine old houses where the manufacturers lived in the years of their pride. For over two hundred years Montjoie flourished, and within the narrow limits of the valley ground became so scarce that the townsfolk built elaborate walls to make little terraces on the precipitous hills, where they might grow their cabbages. But the railway came too late to Montjoie, and the competition of manufacturers more happily situated killed the cloth trade, and for a while at least the kitchen-gardens on the mountain side must have been unnecessary. Now Montjoie has recovered a little of its old prosperity, the girls making silk and the boys working all the week at Aix ; but the fact remains that in fifty years

the population has fallen from three thousand to seventeen hundred. The silk manufacturers have bought the old factories and left them idle to forestall possible competition.

It is to this decline in its prosperity that Montjoie owes much of its picturesqueness, for during the last hundred years it has not been worth anybody's while to build new houses, and the little town has crossed a century of vile architecture unscathed. I have never been in any town that felt so old as this, even though it is lit by gas and devout persons have built a hideous little chapel on one of the hills above it. Its narrow streets, paved with cobbles, and its half-timbered houses projecting over the footway, carved sometimes with pious observations in Latin, and approached by sagging steps adorned with elaborately-wrought hand-rails, create an atmosphere of matter-of-fact unromantic antiquity which is far more impressive than the glamour with which artists endow their conceptions of the past. In the June sunlight there was nothing mysterious about Montjoie ; it rather convinced me that possibly the Middle Ages

are not an invention of the historians. By day the young people were all at work, and the streets were given up to centenarians and kittens, who would have looked very much the same a few hundred years ago as they did then, so that it was easy to give a handful of centuries back to Time and to play at being my own ancestor. In half an hour I had forgotten wireless telegraphy, the phonograph, googly bowling, and all our valuable modern inventions, and was able to walk through the streets with only a casual eye for the queerness of the architecture.

But when night falls Montjoie is full of ghosts and shapes of the dead.

To revert to the houses, they first opened my eyes to the possible poetry of slates, and conquered my normal English æsthetic prejudice in favour of tiles. Between the wide chimneys the slates are spread like butter on a new loaf, in ambitious and tumultuous waves. They are local slates of a delicate colour, so that from the hills Montjoie resembles a colony of brooding doves, and it is easy to fancy that if one threw a stone

into their midst the sky would be darkened by flapping wings, and the valley would be left untenanted and desolate. But it is guarded by two ruined castles, one the mere shell of a watch-tower, the other a beautiful and imposing ruin that will be a desirable residence for any reincarnated *seigneur* by the time the State has finished spending money on its restoration. In chivalrous days this castle was besieged no less than six times, but now the hills are only garrisoned by enormous slugs. The black ones are longer than the brown ones, but they are not so fat; the black slugs are like silk umbrella tassels, the brown ones are like dates.

More interesting to me than the conventional ruins of castles was a large disused cloth factory, for, while it is natural that a castle should be ruined, a factory in decay disturbs our trust in the permanence of our own inventions. It was so large that the little boys had become tired of breaking the window-panes, and many of them were still intact; but through the gaps it was possible to see the looms standing idle under their

coverlet of dust, the engies grown hectic in the damp mists of the river, and the whitewash peeling from the walls in soapy flakes. On these walls the workgirls had written their names and the names of their lovers, and I wondered how many tragic separations there must have been when cloth no longer paid in Montjoie, and half the inhabitants went elsewhere in search of work. Unhappily I discovered this significant sepulchre in the company of a man who was labouring an æsthetic theory that it was necessary to have visited Nuremberg in order to understand Wagner, and disturbed my sentimental speculations with idle babblings on music and architecture. I told him that Wagner would have been far more interested in the cloth factory than in Nuremberg, and that a man who could look at it unmoved was capable only of imitative artistic emotions, which, of course, is true of most men. But I made no convert, even though I pointed out to him the oil-cans still standing where the engineers had put them down for the last time, and the nails where the girls had hung their coats in winter. There

are moments when I hate cathedrals and fine pictures, because they make men blind.

One evening I went up to the factory alone to look for ghosts. The cows were being driven down from the hills with a pleasant noise of bells, and the river was singing huskily, as though the mist had given it a sore throat. As the darkness came on I would not have been surprised if the deserted buildings had throbbed into spectral life, spinning cloth of dreams for the markets of dead cities. But they held mournfully aloof from me and the world, like a Spanish grandee wrapped in a threadbare coat, until a little old woman came out of one of the outbuildings and told me a story in a sad voice. She had worked there as a young girl, and when the smash came those who lived on the premises were allowed to stay there rent-free; but they had all gone one by one, and now she was alone in the midst of the great buildings that had filled her life since she was twelve years old. It was hard to believe that she was not one of the ghosts whom I had been seeking, and I returned

to the town feeling as though I had nearly guessed its secret.

Montjoie is in Germany, an hour and a half by train from Aix la Chapelle and within a day's walk of the Belgian frontier. I descended a precipice one fine evening of June in the company of a mad Belgian architect, and found it waiting for me at the foot. It had waited a thousand years, and it will still lie expectant of the man who shall make it his own when the hand that writes these words is fast once more, after so brief a period of freedom, in fetters of incorruptible dust. The works of man last longer than man himself, though it be but a little longer. And if these old houses tell us only that our forefathers, like ourselves, built shelters wherein they could love secure from the gusty winds and the cold of the world, we are yet aware of a shy conviction that these greying and furrowed stones possess some deeper significance that eludes our judgment, made hasty by the fewness of our years. "If these ruins could speak—" the guide-book says regretfully, when all men know that they are never

silent, though we cannot linger with them to hear their message. If the past would cease to trouble our hearts with its sweet and poignant mutterings, we might succeed in mastering the present, in overcoming the reticence of the days to come. I climbed down into Montjoie on a fair evening of June, and after a fortnight—a fortnight as short as a sunny hour—I climbed out of it back into a restless and unfinished world ; and so it might be thought I had finished with Montjoie and Montjoie had finished with me. At one time this might have been true ; but now I know that I am the slave of my dead hours and shall escape from my servitude no more. Like all men, I am a thousand men, and one man of me wanders still in those steep, uneven streets, looking at the faces of the houses, and waiting for the hour when they shall disclose their secret. Once in a dream I found Time sitting in a garden, and with a dreamer's courage I raised his shaggy eyebrows to peer into his eyes. They were as gentle and kind as a dog's. Perhaps the magic charm of old houses preserves the love and com-

radeship of the men and women who have lived in them. Perhaps when my spirit wanders by night in Montjoie it is cleansed and quickened by the fellowship of the immortal dead.

XXIX

A SUMMER HOLIDAY

DAY after day for thirty days the sun shone on the windless and perspiring city, the city that had complained so often of the cool, grey tent of clouds that had screened it from the heat of summer. Night after night for thirty nights the city lay in breathless torpor, while the feet of men who could not sleep echoed dully on the softening pavements, and the air was troubled with the sound of children crying in their dreams. The aged and the sick loosed their listless fingers and let life pass, and when he looked from his window the artist saw their dusty hearses creeping along the burning street.

In those days he was afflicted with a lethargy of mind and body against which, in moments of consciousness, his creative instinct struggled in vain. He would sit

for hours in front of a white sheet of paper and at the end would start up to realize that in all his mental wanderings he had not shaped one coherent thought. He would lie in bed hour after hour in a kind of dreamless stupor, and sometimes when he had at last made up his mind to get up, the sky darkened while he was dressing and he knew that the day was over. On these occasions it gave him an odd sensation to stand at the window in his pyjamas and peep through the Venetian blinds at the men and women going home from their work. It reminded him of the sunny days of his childhood, when, having been sent to lie down for an hour in the afternoon, he would lift the blind stealthily to look out at the busy world with blinking eyes. The recollection made him sad, and he would stare at the crumpled bed-clothes in disgust of his age. It seemed as though the years had soiled him in their passing.

At this time it was as if his mind had lost the power of creation; it exhausted itself in the labour of thinking while he was

dimly conscious that he was not thinking of anything at all. He achieved extreme misery as a condition of being and not as the result of any mental process. His senses became dulled and untrustworthy. He went for moody walks without realizing any of the scents or sounds of the streets, and when he touched his body with his hands it was so insentient that he would dig his nails in to make sure that it was not dead. This numbness of his intellect and his senses seemed to make a break, or at least a weak link, in the continuity of his existence. When he closed his eyes to examine his consciousness he was aware of immense voids where normally he would have found pulsing blood and eloquent nerves. From being a man with rather more than his share of the wine of life, he became a sluggish automaton, but vaguely mournful for lost treasures and present discomforts. Now and again, however, he would realize that he was doing no work, and, before he relapsed into his age-long torpor, would weary his barren mind with efforts at

creation. Afterwards, looking back at his life with its hundred thousand follies, he knew that these only were lost days.

The thirty-first day came and still there was no rain, so the artist abandoned his work and fled to the sea. As he sat in the train he saw that the fields were scorched brown by the sun and the trees were losing their withered leaves ; but London was already very far away. Once the train ran past a burning heath and the carriage was filled with the acrid scent of a November bonfire. He saw children beating at the edges of the fire with uprooted bushes, and a pall of smoke borne up on the heavy air. But the train ran on and brought him to the sea.

Like most men who work for love, he had never thought of taking a holiday since he had been his own master ; wherever he had gone in the world his work had gone with him, and the emotions bred of his resolution to do nothing for a month were new to him. Freed from its concern with words and phrases, his mind saw life in greater detail and he

was curiously conscious of the shapes and colours of things. He had chosen a sophisticated little watering-place on the Belgian coast for his holiday, where, side by side with the row of tall hotels that stood like a great wall against the sea, the sand-dunes upheld the blue sky with their crests of pale gold like the hair of Flemish fisher-girls. The lemon-coloured beach was inlaid with bathing-machines of a hundred hues, and below the dunes the great black fishing-boats lay high and dry on the sands, the pennants of their weather-cocks fluttering softly in the wind that blew from the sea. The shore was studded with the figures of men and women, and the children were trampling down the surf with their brown feet. Other children were flying kites, and the air was full of strange birds that plucked impatiently at the cord that bound them to earth, and, when they succeeded in breaking it, fell to the ground, too weak to make use of their freedom. Behind the little town lay the tranquil plains of Western Flanders, a fertile land of canals and farms and windmills, and far

off on the horizon he could see the purple towers of Bruges.

In his new mood of holiday-maker he looked at his companions in the town with interest. They were gay and cosmopolitan, and seemed to have been making holiday for years. The grave faces of the fishermen contrasted oddly with this light-heartedness. Perhaps they were dreaming of the long winter months, when the town was their own and only good Flemish was heard in the reticent streets, when the North Sea roared in Flemish against the breakwaters, that murmured now in conversational French to please the children of the visitors. The fishermen stood apart in silent groups, waiting for the tide to release their boats. The artist would have liked to talk with them, but he knew no Flemish.

The red sun set into the sea, the laughing crowd split into families and went in to dinner, and the artist was moved by a sudden sense of loneliness. Every one in the place seemed to be gregarious. The visitors, the fishermen, even inanimate

objects, the hotels, the boats, and the bathing-machines, formed themselves naturally into flocks. He shivered and climbed down to the beach to make friends with the sea.

The tide came in rapidly on the gently sloping sands, and when the tongue of a ninth wave licked his boots he thought of the trusting advances of a large and amiable dog. This sea was a tame beast that made the great sea-wall and the elaborate breakwaters appear ridiculous. It hardly had the force to overcome the sand-castles that the children had left behind them to guard the deserted beach, and in its gentle approach it brought him shy presents of fragile shells and bunches of seaweed like babies' nosegays. But it pressed him back foot by foot, and presently the swart fishing-boats hoisted their sails and crept out one by one under the sky, already faintly powdered with stars. An orchestra struck up a waltz above him on the *digue*, and he saw that the windows of the hotels were blazing with light, and that the guests were dancing with the shadows of the esplanade.

As yet he was content to taste the holiday

spirit timidly, for it seemed to him strong drink for any one who was not accustomed to it. A man may not learn in a moment to talk aloud to strangers, to substitute laughter for thought, to dance under the stars, and to patronize the sea. So the artist kept himself on the fringe of the crowd, and smiled encouragingly to himself to prove that he was making holiday. It would be pleasant, he thought, after a month of unsuccessful struggle, to be merged in this universal unconsciousness. These people could express themselves efficiently by doing nothing at all ; perhaps he could win the secret of their joyous self-satisfaction in a place where even the sea was only a blithely insignificant tourist. He felt the passionate longing of every artist to enjoy life for its own sake.

When the orchestra commenced the seventh waltz he left the dancers and turned inland along a dusty road that stretched, monotonously level, across uneventful fields. The night had not succeeded in enriching this dully prosperous plain with her mystery. The sparse trees did not

bear themselves as giants, there were no mists to change the cropped pasture-lands into violet lakes. Every dusty twig, every sandy blade of grass stood revealed as by the light of a grey November day.

And then he came up to a great flock of sheep that was grazing its way along the wide grassy borders of the road. He heard their teeth tearing the tough grass, and the barking of the sheep-dogs on the skirts of the flock. Presently he overtook the three shepherds with their long poles and coats of undressed sheep-skin. They pointed aloft and cried something to him in Flemish, and following their gesture he saw a red light high up in the sky. The boys had sent up a fire-balloon from the beach below the town, and now it had dwindled to the size of a great red star.

The artist looked at the sheep, at the three shepherds, at the new star that shamed all the lesser lights of heaven. Then he hurried back to his hotel, and started writing. He realized that in a life so short, in a world that at every turn of the road

could prove significant, there was no time to cease from effort. Below him on the esplanade the orchestra was tuning up for the fourteenth waltz, and the scrapings of their bows disturbed the whispering of the gentle sea. His holiday was over.

• XXX

COMMERCIAL LITERATURE

THIS is an age of improving literature. Messrs. Shaw, Galsworthy, Chesterton, Kipling, and Masefield have already improved us considerably, and will no doubt continue to do so, and this is as it should be. But since a changeless diet of lesson-books is unwholesome for the literary student, we may allow ourselves now and again to rest our minds with that kind of literature that leaves us as imperfect as it finds us. French kickshaws are sweet to the palate after a surfeit of your funeral baked meats, and it is probably true that the demand for light fiction increases as our novelists grow more serious. I doubt whether I should have enjoyed my catalogue of bulbs so much if I had not just read that depressing masterpiece "Sister Carrie."

It supplied my mind with a bridge whereby to pass from autumn to spring without suffering from the fogs and east winds and rainy, muggy nights of our English winter, and fitly enough the cover was adorned with a spring-like picture of a pretty Dutch girl—the real article, and not the creature in a striped petticoat that prances gracelessly at English music-halls. Only the artist had not given her a large enough mouth to satisfy my craving for naturalism, for I have noticed that in the Low Countries even the pretty girls can make one bite of an apple. The photographs of flowers with which the book was illustrated were very satisfactory, for the beauty of hyacinths and tulips and daffodils depends on their form rather than their colour, and they lose little by being reproduced in black-and-white.

But even better than the photographs was the letterpress, which had evidently been written by a Dutchman with an equal enthusiasm for flowers and the English tongue. The merits of his prose can only be illustrated by quotation:—“The ubiquitous sparrow is the gardener’s most inveterate

enemy, for of good in the garden he does little or none, while of irreparable damage he annually does much. Sparrows strip our yellow crocuses of their petals. Notwithstanding the possibility of much of the beauty being destroyed by these marauders, it is indefensible to omit crocuses from the garden." In a similar spirit he cries, "Can any one imagine what our gardens, greenhouses, and conservatories would be like in spring if we had no tulips? . . . The dull corner is enlivened by their presence, and the bright place is made still brighter." Moreover, we can have "brilliant effects without putting our hand into our pockets to a very serious depth." How kindly and humanly and wisely he writes of miniature hyacinths :—

"In comparison with the typical Dutch hyacinth it is fair to say that the miniatures are toys, and are not, therefore, worthy of serious attention. For one purpose they no doubt have a substantial value, and that is for children, who, while small themselves, may prefer a small rather than an adult bulb. This is a phase of bulb-growing that might

well be accorded much greater encouragement, for the production of really excellent miniature hyacinths is well within the powers of the little ones; whose interest in flowers is beyond question increased when they can watch the progress of their own nurslings."

With daffodils, as he reminds us, "there is a beautiful latitude in price." We can pay "thirty guineas for some highly extolled novelty, or we can have a thousand sound flowering bulbs for as small a sum as one and a half guineas. 'Common!' some one may say. Yes, but if planted in the grass in the wild garden or the woodland they will make a lovely display." It is difficult to stop quoting a man who can write of the leaves of a plant "showing signs of going to rest," of hardy spring flowers that "make their lovely appearance every year," and who can describe a flower "amaranth red maroon stripes, and all tigered over with black." Let us leave him with his "chaste Poet's Narcissus, which is beloved of everybody. . . . Grow them by hundreds in the garden and by thousands in the grass of the woodland, and their beautiful flowers will never fatigue the eye."

Incidentally this last is a flower that I should recommend for the gardens of critics. In the course of my wanderings in this charming catalogue I have found other bulbs that should also appeal to the catholic student of literature. I shall search his garden next spring for the hyacinths named after Lord Macaulay, Charles Dickens, and Voltaire, for Alfred Tennyson and Sir Walter Scott their crocuses, and for John Davidson daffodils. His tulips must be none other than your "tall and stately Darwins," though perhaps a partial exception might be made in favour of those named after Thomas Moore. In this way flower-beds might be made as significant as a man's bookshelves.

It is strange how poorly an English catalogue compares with these enthusiastic pages from Holland. The home product is better printed and the photographs are better reproduced, but the letterpress is pedestrian, and lacking in that essential quality that the late Mr. J. M. Synge called "joy." It cannot be denied that the English tradesman has an extraordinary contempt for considerations of style. The moment a Frenchman has any-

thing to sell he coins a phrase about it, and nine times out of ten the phrase is poetical. During the recent heat-wave a man who sold fans in the streets of Paris christened them the "little north winds," a flight of fancy of which a London street hawker is certainly incapable. Nor does the catalogue of an English bulb importer remind me of Bacon's essay on gardens, as it very easily might.

Nevertheless there are not wanting signs to cheer the student of commercial literature. I do not greatly care for the newer kind of advertising that apes the impertinent familiarities of a deplorable school of journalism, but it pleases me that Messrs. Whiteley should persuade me to buy their rose-bushes with a quotation from George Herbert. It is even more delightful that the Underground Railways of London should invite me to visit Covent Garden or the Imperial Institute by means of a quatrain of FitzGerald's "Omar." The application may not be obvious to any one who has not seen their subtle leaflet entitled "The Rose"—indeed, it may not be very clear to those who have—but the intention of this and

similar leaflets is excellent. The man in the "Tube" should feel flattered at being approached in so cultured a fashion.

In the day when all our acknowledged writers shall have become preachers or philosophers, perhaps the young men with a theory of beauty and no theory as to the economic conditions of the poor will be permitted to employ their perverse gifts in the preparation of catalogues. They will do it very well, forming new unions between adjectives and nouns, and ransacking their souls to find the true colours and shapes of things. The catalogue as an artistic form hardly exists to-day, but it is certain to make its appearance sooner or later. For instance, there is no reason why a catalogue of fire-irons should not be as emotionally and artistically significant as a necklace of carved beads. It would touch on the natures of metals—how some metals are able to resist fire, while others preserve a polish and charm the eye. It would quote Mr. Max Beerbohm's essay on fire, the raging animal that we keep in cages in our houses, and point out the need for instruments with

which to awake and control and feed this animal. It would examine the characters of men, how one man will want a poker like a sword while another will want a poker like a ploughshare—if such a poker there be. It would liken the tongs to the hands of a miser, and the shovel to a beggar's paw thrust out for alms. It would remind the elderly that the fireguard round the nursery fire is a lattice-window through which young eyes can see half the wonders of fairyland on winter nights, fireships and palaces of flame, lurid caverns inhabited by goblins with red eyes and bodies of smoke. Really, it would be great fun to write a catalogue like that.

XXXI

A MONOLOGUE ON LOVE-SONGS

"I THINK the people who expect you to make fine poetry out of motor-cars and the telephone and old age pensions are very foolish, very foolish indeed. It never has been done, it never will be done. All the great poetry of the world has been concerned with birth and love and death. They are the only things significant enough for so rare a medium of expression, and, of course, they are not really worn out at all. They are new every day, every hour. It is not because of that that people no longer read poetry."

He stirred his glass with the circular turn of the wrist that pulls the heavy grenadine up through the soda-water. The lovers flocked along the Boulevard, walking two by two as if they were already bound.

"Yes, I have read your poems, and I thought they were very pretty. Some of them seemed to me to have been felt ; I think you must have been in love with 'something or other when you wrote them. But what you were in love with—whether it was a girl or an idea of a girl, or yourself, or something that you had found in a book—I really don't know ; and that is my criticism of nearly all the love-poems that have ever been written. Oh, I know that you speak of her lips and her mouth and other bits and pieces of her body—it was a good day for poets when they first thought of doing that—and that really has something to do with love, though there is a set of infamous rascals who pretend it hasn't. But it isn't all—when you sum up the emotional units that compose a love-affair, you will find that it is only an appreciable fraction of the whole. It is the absence of the other elements that makes your poetry artificial."

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"You admit that it isn't all when you fill up your poems with flowers and stars, despair and desire, and eternity and things of that sort. The necessity is disastrous, for it

makes your poems inhuman, and love is the most human emotion we enjoy. Yet when the lovers come to you for news of your passion you give them only a geographical chart of your mistress, and a handful of insignificant symbols. What is the use of these to Charles with his increased salary, or Molly with her new muff? They know that all these things have very little to do with love. What they want is the expression of the poet's passion conveyed in terms that they themselves can understand. I would not make it the final test of poetry, but it seems to me that any really good love-poem should be comprehensible to any intelligent lover . . . without Lemprière, please!"

"Of course you sin in good company. Swinburne's poems are often called erotic, but their passion is purely intellectual, and a nation that was dependent on the first series of Poems and Ballads for their knowledge of love would die of inanition. He talks to a woman and a statue in exactly the same tone of voice, and when we have become accustomed to the brilliance of his technique we realize that he has read about love in a

naughty Greek book. Most of you young poets end by creating the same impression, except that we feel as a rule that you have read your Greek book by aid of a crib."

"What I want, what every one else wants, is evidence that you were in love with a real girl in a real world when you wrote your poems. Then they become interesting, alive. But the conventions that you have borrowed from other poets give them the air of academic exercises: they are pretty, ingenious, what you will, but you and your large-eyed lady appear only as discomfited ghosts who have been bitten by some quaint mythological insect called love. You must remember that nearly everybody has been in love at one time or another, and that writers of love-poetry must be prepared to face an extraordinary number of well-informed critics. Well, you poets make love subtle, remote, mysterious, while all the world knows everything that is to be known about it. Nowadays love is as comprehensible as the measles, as domesticated as a cat. We know its causes, its symptoms, its consequences. What are we to think when

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you tell us of starred heavens and amethystine wings?"

"Listen! It's no good dismissing this kind of criticism as mere philistinism. In love we are all philistines or all poets. You can't say that your love is purer or more æsthetic than that of the shopboy, because you have voluntarily accepted the conception of a universal god, shooting his arrows with a democratic blindness to class restrictions. In effect your kisses are very like the kisses of ordinary men. It is not only poets who appreciate the eyes and lips and bosoms of their mistresses, and so far you are justified in regarding this as an important aspect of love. But there are other aspects no less immediate which you ignore because the other poets ignore them."

"Look out there under the trees where the young men and women are walking up and down in pairs. The atmosphere is almost oppressive with love, but it is a love without wings, without arrows, and with quick, keen eyes. If you were attempting to give a prose impression of that very pleasant parade, I don't think that you would write about

eternity or the petals of roses. It would be far more to the point to 'write about' the little bags the girls carry on their wrists. In every one of them there is change for a franc, a lace handkerchief, two or three letters, and a small powder-box with a looking-glass lid. They look in the glass to make sure that they are pretty enough to meet their lovers. For me a love-poem ought to resemble one of those little bags and contain the same things. Passion? But I wager the love-letters are passionate enough, my friend. It is only you young dreamers who try to keep passion in a water-tight compartment, away from the ordinary emotions of life. In reality it is always mixed up with powder, lace handkerchiefs, and five-franc pieces. To think that in all your hundred love poems you have not once spoken of money!"

"No, I'm not being cynical: there is an economic side to love as there is to all other human relationships. You fall in love with a woman much richer or much poorer than yourself, and you'll realize that only too well. And the looking-glass element enters, too, not only for the woman but also for the man.

Those young fellows out there are pleased enough to be well dressed, and of course a girl in a new hat is not the girl one met yesterday. A little extra peacockry is one of the commonest symptoms of love—a natural desire to look one's best if you prefer it—but you haven't a word to say about it. But when it is lighting-up time for glow-worms the lanes are crowded with poets. Have you ever seen a glow-worm? Ugly little beggars they are, as brittle as lizards. For me a shop-assistant in his new brown boots or a factory girl with her first big hat is a far more striking spectacle ; that is love's livery as it is worn by human beings, and I find it more convincing than your armour or your nasty clinging draperies. I remember once seeing a telegraph-boy talking to a girl in the Strand, and being taken aback by the sight of his smooth young face blazing with passion. Now the only significant thing about a telegraph-boy is his uniform, but if you had had the same impression as I had, and had given birth to one of your poems, you would have said nothing about his uniform and would probably have

called him vaguely a youth, trailing the hideous chains of a monstrous civilization. With the best will in the world, your readers could not have recaptured your impression. They would not have seen what I saw: the flushed, eager face, the desperate, twitching hands, leaping out of a wooden body, all straight lines like a child's drawing on a slate. They would not have seen the contrast between his crisped fingers and his inflexible belt, between his polished boots and his face dabbled with splotches of colour and shades of perspiration. You sacrifice all the beauty of your impressions to the immediate beauty of words or to conventional standards of æstheticism."

"That is why flesh-and-blood lovers laugh at you when, grown too old for poetry, you turn critic and say that all the possible love-poems have been written. As a matter of fact poets have hardly started to write about love yet. A few phrases of Shakespeare's on jealousy, a few fine moments of Robert Browning—odd how the most commonplace of poet-lovers knew more about love than the whole row of passionate singers—a hand-

ful of old songs, a little Burns, and what's left beside? Meredith tried, but when he treats of love he fails at the poetry. So does Coventry Patmore, who might have made a fine thing of the 'Angel in the House' if a course of modern French novels had taught him to distinguish between his real emotions and the emotions he thought he ought to feel. To-day there's A. E. Housman with his 'Shropshire Lad.' I may have forgotten something, but it seems to me that that is the only book of English love-poetry which an intelligent woman would not find silly and high-falutin. And remember that if at the disillusioned end we come to believe that love is a masculine emotion rather than feminine, the women always understand it better than the men. If they only knew how to write, what love-songs they would give us ! Sappho is still there, with all her yearning songs that the careless centuries have mislaid.'

"What we all want now is a poet big enough to throw overboard the conventional knick-knacks, the new art vocabulary, the tight-laced metres, the Birmingham relics of

dead ages with which you youngsters are cumbered, like the White Knight in ‘Alice through the Looking-Glass.’ Of course it isn’t easy. Walt Whitman was a big man, but he threw the poetry overboard as well, and only the born-deaf and the mentally deficient can call the American Rousseau a poet. . . .”

• XXXII

CONVERSATIONAL MISERS

IN our experience modern writers do not shine in conversation as did, if we are to believe their contemporaries, the great men of the past. Nowadays the great novelist speaks dryly about copyright and censorship, the great poet talks about his dinner, and after an evening spent in their society we must fall back on Stevenson's essay "Talk and Talkers" if we wish to preserve the conviction that conversation can be an art.

Our modern Johnsons make whale-like noises only in their articles, and our modern Goldsmith—but we have no modern Goldsmith—would talk like poor Poll in recurring volumes of reminiscences. To sparkle in conversation is now the mark of literary mediocrity, and our great men unpack their

hearts in words in their notebooks and in their private diaries written for publication. Perhaps they are not so lavishly provided with good things as their illustrious forbears, and cannot afford to be generous ; perhaps they are afraid of appearing arrogant to lesser minds that may not sparkle ; but it is certain that the present-day hero-worshipper must expect to find his hero reticent. Possibly if washerwomen could read shorthand they would find the souls of these thrifty giants expressed on their cuffs ; we who have spent an evening in their unimpressive society can only say that we have heard no word of them.

Of course there are rare exceptions, but we fancy that few people would be found to contend that this is an age of accomplished talkers. Yet, if we are not strangely inferior to our ancestors, we must suppose that the spirit that they expressed in talk now finds another outlet. Perhaps every other man we meet is a mute and glorious Pepys, or it may be that the modern taste for writing works of fiction marks the thankless doo of our lost conversationalists. At all events,

in support of the theory that men and women write the things that once upon a time they would have been satisfied with saying, an agreeable piece of evidence lies under our hand.

It takes the form of three fat red notebooks filled with the handwriting of a man who prided himself, we should infer, on its almost painful neatness. He was a schoolmaster, one of those luckless schoolmasters who do not find boys sympathetic, and wander, the dreariest of exiles, through the wastes of school-life. Throughout this mass of unconnected notes—for his respect for form did not extend beyond occasional phrases—his references to his pupils are almost without exception gloomy. He finds his boys lazy, ill-mannered, snobbish, and normally so untruthful that he repeatedly makes the fatal mistake of disbelieving their assertions when they happen to be true. Because of this lack of justice the boys called him Jeffries behind his back, and he notes the fact without comment. Yet, like many people who do not like boys, he was evidently passionately fond of children, and

sweetens his pages with strange little notes of their ways. "Babies eat their bread-and-butter upside down, in order to taste the butter." "When children are sent to bed early they make up their minds not to go to sleep ; when they are lying awake in bed they try to see how many they can count." "When it is snowing the children walk along with their tongues out to catch the flakes." "Nelly hoards her new pennies until they are quite brown and spoiled ; this is the true parable of the talents." "I have to win the affections of children with sweets and little presents. Others can do it without this." Against these we can only set one human observation on his pupils : "There is an oddity in boys : Simmons played truant yesterday to play schools with his cousins."

It will be seen that our schoolmaster cuts a not unamiable figure in his note-books, in spite of the fact that as a master he clearly erred on the side of severity. He was, we may venture, a lonely sort of man separated from his fellows by a gulf of shyness, certainly disillusioned and certainly possessed of vague literary ambitions. "Probably his

note-books were intended to provide materials for some half-conceived masterpiece, for here and there we can see him striving after the finished phrase. Yet often enough he has merely jotted down the heads of his thought, the roughest outline of his impression, so that we who lack the key seek in vain for his meaning. Even when the sense is clear, we feel sometimes that a link is missing between the writer and the written word. "After a certain age it is very necessary that our dreams should be good to eat," is a superficial cynicism that hardly fits his character as we have conceived it. And this: "When we found him in the snow his clothes and hair were stiff with frozen beer; when we lifted him it sounded as though his bones were breaking": is it a reminiscence or the climax of a tale? We scan the next item on the page for an answer, and find only the poignant cry, "How can I stop the barber blowing down my neck?" As an artistic form these note-books are perplexing.

The most coherent section, nearly a whole note-book, is devoted to his notes of a holiday in Paris; but he has hardly escaped the

conventional discoveries that reward all inexperienced travellers. Here and there, however, his individuality crops up. He saw a blind man in the street "who looked as if he saw strange sights in another world," and a drunken man in a 'café who raised his hat before the bar "as before an altar." He examines the *Monna Lisa*, and decides that she is not smiling, and allows the *Venus* to convince him of the ugliness of human arms. "To travel abroad," he notes, "is like visiting the houses of a number of people whom one does not know very well—a trial for a shy man." "The motor-cars pass this hotel like a roaring wind," he writes conventionally enough, and then gives us an astonishing portrait of the proprietor: "His thick lower lip gleams like a wet cherry between his moustache and his beard." There is a picturesque touch about the *grisettes* "struggling with great bundles of linen as with drunken lovers," and then we come on an impression that lacks the revealing word: "The people in the windy streets are like heroes on Japanese prints." Doubtless he had seen something, but he has not told us what he had seen.

Very few of his notes are concerned with literature, but evidently he read a few French books while he was in Paris. He suggests that Dumas modelled the famous escape from the Château d'If on Casanova's equally famous escape from the prison of the *Plombs*, and on Zola's "Œuvre" he writes : "It would seem that the clearer the artist's vision the more certain it is that he will never do anything permanently satisfactory to himself," which goes to confirm the theory that he himself has literary dreams. It is typical of his method that he follows this reflection with the note, "To-day I saw a man whose waistcoat pockets were so large that his hands disappeared in them entirely." We are possibly wrong, but it is difficult to avoid the impression that the odd abruptness of his journal reflected a certain mental incoherence. On one page we find a quotation from Isabelle Eberhardt on happiness, a memorandum that the Charing Cross-road smells of raspberry jam and hot vinegar, a paradox on cowardice—"a man may be afraid of blows, yet his moral cowardice may set him fighting with a stout face"—and the

extraordinary comment, "P—— hates me because I challenge the luxury of his grief."

There is, too, a curious mental contrariety about the man that makes his character difficult to grip. It was not modesty that led him to write: "There are days on which the lowness of the clouds incommodes me and makes me feel cramped," yet a page later we find him writing humbly: "Ibsen says that the majority is always wrong, but I must try to remember that the minority is not always right," and in a still darker mood, "I would like to exchange all my thrills and passions for a life without desire, without hope, and without regret." At times he realized that he was in the wrong minority, poor man!

We have lingered over these note-books partly because they are interesting in themselves and partly because they supply a good instance of the harm people do themselves in being reticent. It is clear that the writer was a man with a serious turn of mind coupled with an odd, individual outlook on life, and failing the society of his likes, he expressed himself only in notes written for

his own eyes, which is no kind of expression at all. For lack of impulse from without, such an impulse as we can all find in good talk, our disillusioned schoolmaster waned at the end to silent nothingness. He hardly even survives in his note-books, for, as we have said, a large part of his notes are now meaningless. He is like one of those misers in whose coffers the impatient heirs find nothing but withered leaves, the fairies, who do not like misers, having substituted the sweepings of the forest for the sweepings of the city. In his lifetime he hoarded the little treasures of his mind instead of sending them out to win interest, and now his notes crumble to dust and all his new pennies are spoiled and brown. Greater men than he are making the same mistake.

**The Gresham Press,
UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED,
WOKING AND LONDON.**

